

Prologue: The Beginning of Everything

My head feels heavy; it hurts. I don't understand why.

The world is pure white.

Where am I looking?

I feel bad; the nausea is terrible.

Cordelia felt as if the space around her was warping and slowly closed her eyes.

The feeling that crept over her wouldn't disappear just because she closed her eyes.

It was at the beginning of winter when an epidemic appeared in the world.

In a flash, the epidemic spread to the Crista Kingdom, the place referred to as the kingdom of fertility, without exception.

Many people would refer to this period as the 『Dark Winter』 for many years to come.

Many people collapsed and suffered and, in a world covered in darkness, in a noble house of the Crista Kingdom, the symptoms of the illness also appeared in the youngest daughter of the Pameradia House; Cordelia.

Shock ran through the Pameradia House.

“We can't afford to lose the daughter who we raised with care to be the future queen here,” they said.

It wasn't like there wasn't a treatment for the epidemic, but no matter how abundant their assets were, or what doctor they obtained through connections, or what state-of-the-art knowledge and medicine they had, Cordelia did not recover. The doctor quietly muttered, “She isn't just afflicted with the epidemic; there might be some other illness that's complicating this.”

For Cordelia, who showed little reaction to the nurses by her side and around the time when people around her began to think, 『It might already be too late』; sudden changes started to occur inside of Cordelia's body.

The epidemic had already disappeared from her body. However, with similar symptoms, but different..... Something no one could guess, let alone a doctor, was happening inside of her.

A mysterious sight appeared inside her, who was now free of the epidemic.

The first thing she saw was a girl.

She had loose-wavy platinum blonde hair and red pupils with pink irises; the signature of the Pameradia House's magic power. She had a lovely aura about her that would make people look twice.

But the impression of that figure suddenly changed.

The girl's eyes were icy and scornful words spewed from her mouth.

『Know your place.』

That appearance; that voice.

Cordelia realised.

She is 『Cordelia』 and she's the future 『me』 .

I knew about her when I was in Japan.

She was the rival of the protagonist in an Otome game. [1]

The moment she understood that, things that she had never seen before flowed into her mind.....
However, a lot of the scenery was familiar to her.

Mountains of buildings, the station, the school, cars.

Cordelia's brain screamed from too much information, but even within her dazed consciousness,
Cordelia firmly understood her standing.

——— *I was reborn into an extremely horrible villainess noble girl.*

That was the last thing she'd realised before a whirlpool of information once again swallowed her.

↑1 Love simulation Game

Act 01: Cordelia

Platinum blonde hair and white skin. She had red pupils with pink irises, the signature of her house's magical heritage. Those who saw her, who strongly inherited the unique features of Earl Pameradia's House, would unanimously say, "She's exactly like a fairy," in praise.

She was Cordelia Enna Pameradia.

She was the youngest sibling out of four in Earl Pameradia's House and the second daughter. She was raised while being showered in praise ever since she was born into this world, and there were whispers that she would one day marry the Prince, who was close to her in age. It didn't matter how young Cordelia was, nor if the person herself had no intention of marrying him.

Yes, Cordelia had no intention of marrying the Prince. Even though she was born as one of the kingdom's nobles, and in addition to that, she was a daughter of one of the most prominent Earl families. No matter how honourable she was taught it was ——, no, instead, she was informed that it was her duty to do so.

Cordelia was aware of the fact that 『she wasn't normal』.

She possessed memories from her previous life.

She was three years old when she remembered it.

As her consciousness was hazy from suffering the nightmares of the epidemic, memories of her being 『Japanese』 began to flow into her mind, one after another. As a result, her brain screamed, and she hovered at the border of life and death for about ten days..... She could certainly say that her life had been extended because of that, since if things went the way they were, then the future where she killed herself would come.

Yes, her situation also existed in the frightening memories that she had recalled. No, to be more accurate, it was the her who would grow up to become an adult.

『Cordelia』 was in a game she had played in her previous life; to be more specific, it was a game that had a heroine and beautiful young men..... In short, she was the 『Selfish Villainess Ojou-sama』 that appeared in love simulation games.

The 『Cordelia』 in the game was gorgeous, but she wasn't suited to her appearance. She was an extremely nasty person with a lot of pride. She was a cruel girl who looked down on those who had a lower social position than hers and saw them as only things to be used. That girl fell in love with the Prince, and she despised the heroine, despite the heroine also being from an Earl house like 『Cordelia』, since she lived for a long time amongst the townspeople. Also, she always plotted against the heroine.

Naturally, 『Cordelia』 was not chosen by the Prince and the goal of the game was to marry the heroine and the Prince according to the player's choices.

..... If it were just that then it would still be fine. There wouldn't be any problems.

However, 『Cordelia』 was impatient because of the relationship between the Prince and the heroine. She caused a riot with magic to raise her reputation but she failed when she tried to control the situation, and it caused her to lose her life. As a result, her whole family also received punishment. That was also implied in the story.

I think that it was the education policy in her house that caused her to grow up to be that kind of person, but that's not the story at the moment.

Cordelia was astounded.

What a nuisance I've reincarnated into.

Why, would I be reincarnated into the option I wouldn't choose at all if I had the choice? It's awful.

But there was probably a silver lining in the dark cloud; Cordelia was still only three years old when her memories returned to her. Her innocence had yet to be distorted and, as a noble, she was still a relatively normal Ojou-sama. She didn't even sneak around to eat snacks; she was a good girl who properly listened to what people said. In other words, she wasn't infamous or anything. She also didn't have a radical personality or aimed too high.

In brief, she would live within her means. If she didn't get involved with the Prince and avoided the heroine, then she should be able to prevent the worst outcome.

This was for her survival.

She would be told to aim for the position as the Prince's consort in the future (in fact, she felt as if they were already pressuring her to do so), but she wouldn't yield at all..... No matter what happened, she was determined to avoid the Prince. She would eliminate any seeds of anxiety. Her instincts to avoid him were screaming at her.

Thus, a feverish three-year-old Cordelia made a firm and resolute decision. She had then recovered from her illness and was now in the present.

Of course, her resolution at that time remained unchanged.

However.

(Now that I've calmed down and thought about it, it's a waste to devote my life to just 『Avoiding the Prince』.)

What fun would it be to live my life like that? No matter the reason, wouldn't it be boring to live my life like that?

Besides, to begin with, it would be harder to 『get close to the Prince』 than 『avoiding him』.

She didn't think that she would get closer to him herself, but assuming that she did so without meaning to, then she would need to devise some plans ——; for example, she felt like she could accomplish her goal if she 『did not match the Prince's taste while in conversation』. It was unlikely that the Prince would go out of his way to make a girl, who didn't have similar values to him, the Queen. After all, the

Prince had the choice to have any girl in and out of the kingdom for his bride. Even if she were to get involved with the Prince, she would act curtly and try not to get too deeply involved with him as best as she could. Then, no problems should occur.

(Anyway, if I only focus on avoiding the Prince, then what should I do after he gets married? It would surely be a peaceful life, but it's sad to be left with nothing.)

Her life goal wasn't to avoid the Prince.

Avoiding the Prince was just a 『checkpoint』 that she must pass.

(Then..... What else should I do?)

Cordelia suddenly looked at the mirror while thinking those thoughts, and found an answer.

(『Cordelia』 is cute. It isn't a problem to say that she would grow into a beautiful girl.)

Even if she was cute at the age of three, it was still too early for her to say that she would turn into a beauty.

(If it's like this, ——.)

Cordelia came up with one thing that she wanted to try.

She wanted to improve the beautiful appearance that she was born with.

It wasn't a very childish idea, but her mind, too, was indeed not that of a 3-year-old. 『It is better to improve yourself as soon as possible』 ; that was her determination.

She took action the same day.

Her outward appearance was important, but so was her aura, which enriched her beauty; things such as posture and gestures, which she would have to learn from then on. To be not only beautiful but also elegant —— that was what she was determined to do.

Thus, Cordelia began her journey down the road of being a diligent child.

Of course, ever since she had that incident, before and after her illness, there was a difference in what Cordelia asked for and wanted from those around her. But luckily, no one around her ever grew suspicious of her. They said it was thanks to her growth period. “Ojou-sama is very intelligent,” and “You are growing more and more every day.” Those who noticed the change in Cordelia were the servants and tutor; her family members, who usually had little interaction with each other, didn't notice it. But still, the head of the family, her father Earl Elvis Pameradia, was informed by the butler.

About a year later, Cordelia started to practice her 『Lady Training』 .

When she turned four, Elvis clearly said to Cordelia in a stronger tone than usual, “You must strive to marry into the Royal family.”

It wasn't something that he had brought up before. No, she could understand that from the mood, but she never imagined that he would say something like that at this point.

A noble girl of high standing should obey her father's orders.

However, she had no choice but to shake her head.

Die. I'll die. I can't die.

So, she appealed to her father with a desperate look on her face.

What should I say? The Prince and I are close in age.

She would still be at a disadvantage if she threw a tantrum there. However, Cordelia yelled even if she understood that, "I don't wanna!"

It was completely inexcusable for her to joke about it.

(What can I say to persuade him?! What should I say.....?)

The maids, who took care of her, also started panicking seeing Cordelia so desperate.

Furthermore, Cordelia's tantrum made Elvis furious. He slapped her across the cheek..... At that time, Cordelia said with her eyes redder than usual, "Cordelia will marry Otou-sama in the future! That's why I don't want to marry the Prince!!"



Yes, the only thing she could come up with was a child's privilege.

That was by no means Cordelia's true feelings.

That was just merely an 『excuse』 .

Cordelia and her family rarely interacted with each other.

The relationship between her siblings was fine, but it was strictly 『fine』 at best. Her soon-to-be-married older sister seemed busy working as a proxy for their mother, who was a recluse. Her older brothers lived in a dormitory, so they were rarely home. However, their relationship wasn't bad. It might even be good.

Her relationship with her parents, however, was extremely devastating. She had only seen her mother's face a handful of times and only met her father when he had 『things to talk about』 , like just now.

So naturally, Cordelia had no reason to put forth the effort into her reason for her father.

She only uttered those words to simply buy time.

However, those words were unexpectedly useful on the stubborn Elvis.

Elvis, who was not concealing his intense anger, lost his composure and looked at Cordelia, dumbfounded.

“I-is that so.....” Elvis said awkwardly and then hastily left. It seemed that his anger had disappeared entirely. That surprised both Cordelia and the maids. That was because it was the first time that her usually stern father was unable to mask how troubled he was.

Although Cordelia did understand that he 『was happy and wanted to hug his child for the first time ever』 and thought, *Eh, why is the way this person thinks so cute?* Then, two days after the 『I want to be Otou-sama's bride』 incident, the old butler told her why her father acted like that while 『talking to himself』 .

Since then, Cordelia took every opportunity to appeal, 『I love Otou-sama』 to Elvis since he was adorable.

But even more than just Cordelia thinking that her father was cute, she was spoiled by him a lot more. Her father was still the same stern man in front of her other siblings, but when it was just the two of them talking, the way he worded things was completely different —— . To be more specific, it was only a slight change, but he also wore a small smile on his face.

At first, when she declared, “I want to be your bride,” she wasn't serious; but now she thought, (*If there was someone like father then I'll swiftly propose to them*). She thought that someone with a gap moe personality [1] might say something like that.

But even though Cordelia hung onto the 『I love Otou-sama』 filter, she began to think and gradually feel, (*Isn't father doting on me a little too much?*)

The first time she fully realised that was when she was eight.

At that time, the thing that Cordelia was most interested in was medicinal plants.

People in the Pameradia House could use various kinds of magic, but she found out at that time that they especially excelled in magic that boosted the properties of plants.

That was why when she 『came home from school』, she secretly snuck into the garden, where she sucked on the nectar of a flower and was surprised by its sweetness. It was convenient magic where she could use it if she touched the plant while thinking about the magic.

Therefore Cordelia thought, *(If there is an ability to enhance the properties of plants, then I might be able to make amazing medicine if I use more effective medicinal plants)*. Even though it was just a rough idea, she immediately went home and hunted for books in their beautiful library. That was how much she was interested in it.

In her past life, she was so fascinated by plants that she studied them at the 『university』. However, she was even more intrigued by the possibility of being able to create something even better. If she could do so, then it would be a waste not to use it.

One day, Cordelia suddenly said to the workaholic Elvis, who had shoulders as stiff as boards, “There might be something good for father’s body, so I want to study medicinal herbs in the future.” Elvis was so touched by his daughter’s words that he promised that he would give her a glass-covered greenhouse.

Be that as it may, Cordelia thought he was joking.

However, ten days later, she got it.

There shouldn’t be any greenhouses in this Kingdom..... Or so she thought, but it seemed that it was designed and supervised by her father. The greenhouse was constructed with technology from all ages and places. Even though it only took ten days to build, it was able to withstand all types of magic. Incidentally, her father seemed to have used something called annual leave for the first time so that he could build it.

(Does this world even have yearly leave? And the first time..... You work too much, Otou-sama.)

Cordelia looked off into the distance as she thought that, but he was spoiling her way more than she’d expected he would. It was still far too early to prepare for the future. This was too lavish a present to give to an eight-year-old.

In this world, with neither gas nor electricity, there were instead magic tools similar to 『electrical appliances』 that consumed magic power. But the expensive prices they had was nothing compared to Japan. A magic tool that blew hot wind to dry hair..... Or what was called 『Dryer』 in her previous life, was the same price as a carriage there.

None of the magic tools lasted as long as electrical appliances, and at the same time, there weren’t any innovations in that field. That was why there was very little variety. If there were just even a little variation in the magic tool, then the price would skyrocket. That was why Cordelia wasn’t able to even

fathom the cost of the greenhouse, which utilised all the advanced magic tools. Cordelia felt lightheaded before being happy.

However, it would be a waste not to use the building that she'd received. She hated being wasteful.

Cordelia, who was still thinking about what was yet to come, began to think about what she could research on, before making rapid development. First, she decided to work with wild plants that were referred to as 『herbs』 in her previous world. The reason for that was because she had some knowledge from researching them in her previous life.

It wouldn't be a lie to say that she wanted to research for her father's sake, but she had such a fantastic facility. Since she had it, she wanted to make something that would be useful to herself in the future.

Another reason was the cosmetics situation in this world.

She learnt from a book in the library about refined essential oils obtained from faintly sweet nuts with hard shells that looked like walnuts from her former world. With just that level of stimulus, and lacking any scented balms and perfume, by combining it with the effects of magic, products that were beneficial for skin could be made. But it had been patented ever since it was announced 200 years prior.

Yes ——— it was reasonable to hear that the tradition had been patented, but there had been no further innovation for it in the previous 200 years. Nothing had been done to improve the production method, or to improve the variety itself. The reason for that was that there weren't many types of nuts that could be refined and the fact that the trees could only produce a certain amount of nuts at once, and in turn, those trees themselves were challenging to grow. Above all else, the nuts were too delicate, and the refining process required a high amount of magic power to be channelled and was very difficult. That was why the price was extremely high.

In spite of its limited use and variety, it was still hard for even high ranking nobles to get their hands on it. Some said, 『There is value in it because it can't be obtained』. Because there were circumstances like that, there were a lot of nobles who substituted perfume, and used garden flowers concealed as potpourri. However, the potpourri was only dry flowers, and she had a hunch that the only thing it had was its fragrance.

However in contrast to the hard to obtain nuts, herbs with little magical waves hadn't been considered until then. Herbs were different from nuts and didn't need complex magic adjustments. *Since nuts didn't contain toxins, it shouldn't be necessary to cancel it out with magic.*

So why do they continue to ignore herbs.....? The reason was most likely because it was 『wild grass』.

Excluding the few that used herbs in cooking, most people thought of herbs as nothing but 『weeds』 in this world. At least, that was how books treated them. That was why it wasn't at a level where they would be recognised for their fragrances. It was instead because of that that the idea of using herbs wasn't created.

To make matters worse, fragrant herbs only grew deep in the mountains. The herbs that chefs used were either grew at the base of mountains or cultivated by people. However, it was quite easy to make fertile land that was rich in magic and grow flowers, as long as they could be obtained..... For example,

some herbs couldn't grow outside of their natural environment so that you would need soil from the mountains.

To begin with, she knew about herbs that other people in the world weren't even familiar with because she knew about them from her previous life. But even if she knew about them in her last life, it was hard to confirm the existence of herbs that weren't edible like basil. Unfortunately, she wasn't able to find books specialising in herbs in the library. She finally found a picture in a large encyclopaedia as a result of her reading the library books like crazy. However, there were no mentions of where to find the herb. So she couldn't confirm if it existed or not.

Cordelia secretly asked the head chef, "Are there no other fragrant herbs besides the edible ones?"

It was outside of the head chef's expertise, but he asked his acquaintance and gathered information for Cordelia. As a result, she discovered that there were many herbs in the world that she recognised growing in the wild. She asked the head chef for more favours; she asked him to obtain peppermint, which wasn't used in food in that world, and tried to touch its magic lightly; the leaves became more vibrant than before, and Cordelia realised that she had a high affinity with the herb and its magic. Also, unlike nuts, it didn't have any peculiar handling methods. She was convinced that it had a lot of potentials.

Cordelia seized the opportunity.

If she could produce essential oils from easy to manage medicinal herbs and succeeded in producing cosmetics from them, then it would be possible to lower the costs significantly. In addition to that, the distribution prices could also be reduced to some extent. Of course, it was necessary to keep a certain price for high-class goods; but it would work out somehow if she classed them by quality. Above all else, nobles were the types who liked to follow new trends. If she could produce essentials oils that only she could make, then she would inevitably be contacted by them in the future. Of course, something that she could use was helpful, but so was making connections. The more people she knew, the better. Even if there were connections that she, herself couldn't use, Elvis might be able to use them.

Since she decided to enhance the beauty she was born with; she had no reason to let go of the chance to build personal connections, which might become a weapon in her arsenal later on.

Thus, Cordelia raised the curtain on her rebellion 一一一.

↑1 when a character acts differently from their habits/personality/character, etc.

Act 02: The Noble Girl's Plan to Go Out

The memory Cordelia had, as she held the letter in her hand, was of her former world when she was in 『kindergarten』 and 『exchanging letters』 was still popular.

She had never been good at writing them, and no one could only be contacted with a letter. That was why she didn't have any good or bad memories in regards to letters.

But now, Cordelia was very impressed by the letter she'd received.

(There are a lot of different herbs ——!)

Cordelia paused for a moment to control her excitement and once again looked at the letter, —— or rather the report, which she'd received from the head chef.

It was a 『Catalogue of Strong Fragrant Wild Grasses』 — — — in other words, the herbs' habitats were written down. The catalogue listed that herbs that she was familiar with, such as peppermint, sage, chamomile and lavender; and they grew in a mountain, relatively close to the Royal Capital.

Cordelia raised the corners of her lips.

(This is wonderful.....)

The letter, which contained information about many herbs that she specialised in, was like a treasure box filled with jewels. It felt even more radiant than real jewels and filled her with joy. If she could get her hands on those herbs, then it would be a superb start for her research.

(If I can get my hands on them, then it'll be crucial for me to decide how to start my research.)

But then, she noticed a big problem.

Although she knew the place, the herbs' habitat was in a mountain.

“A young noble girl going to the mountain to pick wild grass..... Can I go?”

Even though it was relatively close to the Royal Capital, the mountain was abundant with magic; thanks to that the plants grew well, but for the same reason it was a danger zone where monsters also appeared. So even if Elvis spoiled his daughter ——; no, instead she got the impression that he wouldn't give her permission to go because he loved her so much.

Of course, she could probably obtain stock if she ordered the servants to get it. However, Cordelia wanted to go there herself and confirm the state of wild growth. She might be able to discover herbs that weren't written in the catalogue if she went there herself. She was also just curious about going out of the mansion.

Ever since she was born, she'd rarely stepped outside of the mansion.

It wasn't like she was directly prohibited from going outside, but, in the first place, it was probably that 『noble children don't usually go for strolls』. She had also never been invited to go out. She didn't think that it was prohibited entirely, because she had read novels in the library where the children

would go out [accompanied by a guardian] to meet their fiancés/fiancées; but it was probably difficult to go out without reason.

(I want to meet my fated plants..... Just kidding, that would be unreasonable.)

Now then, what should I do?

Cordelia thought it was troublesome, but she had no intention of giving up.

In her previous life, she would go anywhere and everywhere for the sake of research. That was why her instincts told her 『It isn't good to stay cooped up in the mansion』. Besides that, she was trying to do things outside of the world's conventional wisdom. That was why she didn't think that she would hit success if she relied on others. It was necessary for her to go to the actual place.

However, she also understood that if she aimed to be a proper lady, she couldn't disregard trifling conventional wisdom outright. If she were to go out, she would have to figure out a solution that didn't deviate from the behaviour of a proper lady. Moreover, she needed a reason that would not neglect her escorts, and would convince her father.....

“Ah.”

She thought to that extent and found one possibility.

“If I were to accompany Isma-oniisama on his ride.....”

The Pameradia House's third child and second son, Isma Ismael Pameradia.

Cordelia recalled that person.

Cordelia had three siblings: eldest brother; who was fourteen years her senior; his younger twin, her eldest sister, who was already married to the second son of a Duke House, and her second older brother, who was twelve years older than her. Among them, her eldest and second brother were both knights in the Imperial Guards.

Those brother of hers were off-duty two days out of ten. They usually lived at the dormitory, but they would return home on those days. Once back, Isma would head out to go on horse rides. To him, the best method to soothe him from his rigorous work was a horse. Naturally, since he was a knight on duty, he didn't require an escort —— Nonetheless, they couldn't let him go somewhere by himself, so someone from the mansion would always follow behind him. However, she had heard that he would also frequent deep into the mountains.

Isma had playfully asked Cordelia this before, “Do you want to come along too?”

At that time, Cordelia had been too surprised at his unexpected question to reply, but she clearly remembered what he'd said. Isma had a benign nature compared to Elvis and her eldest brother, and he was also a gentle-mannered person. He also had a friendly face. Elvis would say something like, “I'm home,” in greeting and Isma would entice a conversation with, “What did you do today?”

However, it didn't mean that their relationship was good, even if he asked her to go along with him on his ride; it might have just been social pleasantries. However, even if it were a joke, he wouldn't reject Cordelia, who he had previously invited before, outright if she wished to go. She bet on that possibility.

Cordelia immediately pulled out some stationery and composed carefully written sentences. Writing wasn't her forte, but her letter would be reviewed. ——— In other words, her message would be read over by someone else. As a daughter of the Pameradia House, her letters must be written beautifully. Even if the person who read it didn't disclose the contents, it was ideal not to show any openings.

In the first place, it was her first request to her brother, so messy writing was out of the question.

(Now then, what will onii-sama's response be?)

The words she wrote, full of expectations, had contained a little bit of liveliness and an easy-going feel to them.

However, a reply from Isma never came.

She had heard that Isma, being the youngest member of his unit, had a lot of tasks, so it was rash to think that he'd refuse just because she hadn't received a reply.

That was why Cordelia continued to earnestly wait for him to come home. When that day came, it was inevitable that she anxiously awaited his arrival. She stood firmly at the entrance while staring outside. Usually, she would be endeavouring in her dance lessons and studies at that time, but she was exempt from all classes for these two days, today and tomorrow, thanks to her doing her best and picking up her pace.

Regarding Elvis, she was able to persuade him three days after she'd come up with the plan.

"I want to accompany Onii-sama on his ride," the first time when she'd said those words, her father looked reluctant and questioned in a mutter, "Can you even ride a horse?" But, other than that, he didn't accept or refuse her. Therefore, she kept on asking for permission. Finally, she received the answer, "I'll leave it to Isma to decide."

The reason why he was reluctant was the same reason as she'd come up with before; she had also assumed that he couldn't immediately refuse her because there was a horse.

Equestrianism was also part of a noble's education. However, compared to other education practices, very few women learnt it, because it required them to be active. However in return, for example, 『Being one of the few who had hobbies in common with men』 could be an advantage for future connections.

(Which meant that the most critical issue was safety. I'm thrilled that Onii-sama is a knight.)

If Isma wasn't a knight, then it was highly probable her request would have been refused for safety reasons.

(Onii-sama, won't you come home sooner?)

Isma probably wouldn't show up in the morning if he came back at the usual time.

However, Cordelia kept waiting for him without moving, with the expectation that today might be different.

Time moved as it usually did, but she felt as if it was moving a lot slower.

In the end, Isma came home at the same time he always did, which was a little past noon. He seemed to have finished the paperwork, for when he was on duty at dawn, and his eyes, which were already red, were even redder.

Isma didn't resemble Elvis aside from his pupils; his traits were his gentle eyes and slightly lighter chestnut hair. He was tall but slender, and gave off a somewhat feeble impression; if she were to use a word from her previous life, then she would say that he looked like a 『flirt』. He was a genuine knight, who dressed in a knight's armour and looked great with swords, but for some reason, he looked like a flirt. She didn't think that it would be surprising if he had a fan club in the Royal Capital.

However, Isma was still someone from the Parmeradia House. There were no rumours about him floating about.

On the contrary, it was worrying how there were no rumours.

Even Isma had enough strength to be a knight. Even if he looked tired, he could still move around after sleeping for about two hours. Today would probably be like that as well.

"Looks like you were waiting eagerly, Cordelia."

"Good work, Isma-oniisama."

Isma couldn't hide his wry smile, probably because he'd guessed why Cordelia had been waiting for him.

"Are you serious about what you wrote in your letter?"

Isma bent down and got onto one knee, to match his younger sister's height. He looked directly at Cordelia with his similarly red eyes.

His slightly narrowed eyes nearly made Cordelia hold her breath, but instead, she said, "Yes, of course!"

Not to be outdone, she lifted Isma's right hand with both her hands.

"Hey, Onii-sama. Please take me with you. I'd like to go to Schiwiel Forest."

"To think that my sister, who is attached to the library and father, would nominate me for the job. Moreover to the forest..... Did mother influence you?"

"Okaa-sama? Did you meet with Okaa-sama?" Cordelia was surprised by the unexpected question and ended up asking Isma in return.

Does Okaa-sama like the forest? I've never heard that before.

Isma grinned slightly because of Cordelia's question.

"..... Onii-sama?"

“No, it’s nothing. We’ll go tomorrow. The forest glistening in morning dew is a beautiful sight, so we’ll leave early in the morning.”

“Y-yes.”

“Sorry but I’ll go sleep for a bit. You should return to your room, Cordelia.” Isma’s words were a little muddled. He stroked her hair, stood up and disappeared to the upper floors, where his room was.

(..... As I thought, maybe it was something I wasn’t supposed to ask.)

They seldom met, but of course, it wasn’t like Cordelia didn’t know her mother at all.

Her mother was a beauty with the same light chestnut hair as Isma and her sister. Even just one of her movements showed her elegance, and her presence was amazing. Her etiquette tutor also taught her how to move beautifully, but compared to the tutor..... No, her mother was endowed with refined elegance that couldn’t be compared.

However, her mother had always been a recluse. No matter how graceful her movements were, that behaviour wasn’t elegant at all.

Her relationship with her mother was terrible, and her mother hadn’t visited Cordelia since she was seriously ill at the age of three. Even if she walked passed her mother in the corridor, all she did was bow to her; they never spoke to each other. Rather than being ignored, Cordelia felt as if her existence itself wasn’t even recognised.

Cordelia had tried to contact her mother many times in the past.

The first reason was that she wanted to avoid her frightening future. After all, if you become a Countess, you’re bound to have a strong influence at home. If she wanted Cordelia to be Queen in the future, like Elvis did, then she couldn’t afford to stay in contact with her mother.

However, Cordelia had yet to have a conversation with her mother. Even if she wanted to set an appointment with her mother, her mother’s maid would always come back with a refusal message. Eventually, it happened so many times that Cordelia gave up on the idea of contacting her mother. She wasn’t abandoning her future; it was just that she’d finally realised that her mother’s existence wouldn’t have any effect on her future.

It seemed that her mother was just simply not interested in the Parmeradia House.

According to what the maid had told her when she’d pestered her for information:

Her mother fell in love with Elvis, who was a knight and begged her father by marketing herself to establish their engagement.

However, Elvis, who had accepted the engagement, had no interest in her mother and thought of it as a political marriage.

To make matters worse, Elvis resigned as a knight before they married.

Even after quitting the knights, Elvis didn’t act like a husband and remained aloof.

Of course, the maid spoke in a roundabout way; she spoke as if she was telling a story, but Cordelia omitted the unnecessary parts and summarised it. Surprisingly, her mother acted as if 『it would be better for my husband to be troubled』, so she shouldn't have been interested in things such as Cordelia's marriage, which seemed to be advantageous for the Parmeradia House.

Because of that, Cordelia stopped trying to meet with her before she'd turned four. She wasn't able to get through to her mother; on top of understanding that she couldn't be a burden to herself, she was also reluctant to try to force someone to mediate between them, so that she could meet her mother. Fortunately or unfortunately, Elvis didn't seem to care, so there was no need to get involved with her mother more than needed.

(..... I wonder if the selfish behaviour of the [Cordelia] in game was inherited from her Okaa-sama.)

Cordelia muttered in her mind while suddenly thinking of her mother.

Elvis had indeed said, 『You will get married to the Crown Prince』 and it was highly likely that 『Cordelia』 also thought, 『Of course I would』.

(..... If this was like the story, then it seems that Okaa-sama would cheer up if Otou-sama just talked to her..... But Otou-sama doesn't look like he cares at all, so it's hard to improve the situation.)

Cordelia secretly sighed while watching Isma retreat to brush her off. She wanted to hear about it from Isma's point of view too, but she could understand why he wanted to keep his mouth shut. No matter the reason, he was probably hesitant to tell his little sister that, "Mother is avoiding you."

Although she understood that, Cordelia realised that she was somewhat depressed. She got a strange feeling; her own, or rather 『the real Cordelia's』 heart ached. She was surprised at being depressed over someone who she only ever saw; someone who didn't even think about her..... And also, about the existence that was within her that wasn't her.

Still, Cordelia tightened her jaw and returned to her room without stopping.

“『There are times when a noble must suppress their emotions』 or something like that.”

She closed the door with a click while muttering one of the things that her tutor told her many times. *I can't show that I'm upset. I would lose my tact, and a gap would open in my heart. It would become a hindrance for when I think about my next step.*

Those were words that were familiar to her, but she didn't think she could apprehend them right then.

(I'm glad that there aren't any lessons today.)

If someone found me right now, then I wouldn't be able to keep my composure. With that in mind, Cordelia slowly walked to the middle of her room and pulled her thin lace curtains.

I was just tired because I had been too excited this morning and thus became a little upset when Isma-oniisama brought up Okaa-sama. I didn't care about it that much.

She thought that and, although the action was terrible for a noble lady, slowly fell onto her bed.

(It's okay, my head will clear up after I sleep.....)

But a small voice began speaking to Cordelia from the dark world behind her shut eyes as if it was disturbing her thoughts.

Hey, it isn't like mother isn't interested in the house; doesn't she hate you?

——— *Shut up.*

She's your mother right? Aren't you lonely? Even though she met your brother.

——— *Then what are you saying I should do?*

Cordelia rolled over as if to shake off her thoughts and slightly opened her eyes.

RUSTLE RUSTLE

It looked as if the hanging curtains were accusing her of something.

(..... That's right. I didn't think anything of it. The feelings of loneliness are a lie. She's the best example of who not to be. I won't become a stubborn woman just because things don't go my way. I will become a woman who can jump through hoops. Even if it was out of the ordinary of this world ———; I will achieve happiness on my own.)

Cordelia surrendered herself to the long-awaited drowsiness.

(..... Let's quickly become a proper lady. Keep looking ahead without getting swayed by my emotions.)

She made a firm resolution in fading consciousness.

Act 03: Second Older Brother, Isma's Monologue

For the longest time since I was born I was the youngest child, but eight years ago, my younger sister, named Cordelia, was born and I became an older brother. I was 12 at that time..... But to be honest, I pitied Cordelia.

I'd never imagined that my sister could be conceived, what with my parent's relationship being heavily strained, but I could easily figure out the reason behind it.

The child was to become the companion of the Prince, who was born half a year earlier than her.

If the child had been born a male, he could possibly become the Prince's friend, but if the child was female, then she had the possibility of becoming the Queen. I thought that there were no other possible reasons for her being born. Although I was only 12 at that time, I was educated enough to understand that.

I sympathised with my sister, who was born into that, and thought, *it would have been better if she was at least born a male*. If she had been born a male, then she could somewhat decide her own future, but her fate was already chosen for her the moment she was born female.

『Aim to become Queen in the future. It's impossible for you not to be Queen.』

She was probably raised with only those words. I pitied her just when I thought about what would happen if things didn't work out. Well, the me who thought that, had severe feelings of inferiority at that time, so I wonder if my circumstances were still luckier than Cordelia's. That also was nothing but trifling.

I was the second son but my elder brother, who was cut from the same cloth as father, was clearly treated differently.

On the surface, we received the same education, but I instinctively realised that I was a 『spare』 from the environment we were in. I was never expected to achieve results above a certain level, and even though I did well in rare cases, I was never praised. Also if I were complimented, I would be compared to my brother; 『But it doesn't seem like you can beat your eldest brother』. If not, then I would be compared with father; 『Elvis-sama was even more amazing when he was younger』.

I have been called a prodigy, but it was always followed by those same words. *So, I'm not a prodigy after all*. The feelings I had when I thought that were a little depressing, and there were times when I resented my brother. When I was younger, I was enthusiastic about winning against my brother someday. Well, but that was only when I was younger. I gradually became jealous of him, then acted stupidly, and finally gave up. Now, I've already settled with 『as expected of elder brother』.

But even so, when Cordelia, who strongly inherited the blood of the Pameradia House, was born, on the one hand, I felt sorry for her; and on the other, I was glad that she was born as my sister.

If Cordelia had been born male, then my inferiority complex would have definitely solidified. My feelings had sublimated now, but if I were to be caught up between older and younger brothers, then I probably wouldn't have been able to hold it in. I was really impatient, and I might have become an atrocious brother.

Well, that's enough about me.

Father hired a live-in tutor for Cordelia to educate her as a future consort of the royal family almost as soon as she was born. Thus, my sister received education as a lady before she could even speak. *Aren't you too hasty, father?*

Because of those circumstances, Cordelia had more restrictions than me; they were perhaps on the same level as elder brother's. Although, that was the only thing she knew, so I didn't feel like she'd suffered from those restrictions. My sister was a fast-learner, and the maids and tutor always raved about her as if she'd overwhelm everything in the world.

When I saw that, I honestly thought that it couldn't possibly be good.

I could understand if someone praised a child for being cute or smart, but they shouldn't compliment them more than necessary since the child could grow up to be spoiled, you know? Cordelia also looked somewhat smug whenever she was praised, so I was concerned that she would grow up to be spoiled.

However, my parents, who were supposed to have stopped that, ignored her and left her be, so no one cautioned her. So no matter what happened to her in the future, my parents were to blame. I wondered if it would be okay for her to aim for the Queen's seat with how she acted, but that didn't bother me as long as I stayed away from her. I thought it would be fine as long as I didn't spark the flame.

After two years of being a trainee and a year on duty in the north, when I enlisted in the Imperial Guards and came home..... I never imagined that father would dote on Cordelia.

Father seemed to be trying to hide the fact that he doted on her, but unfortunately, Cordelia messed it all up. No offence to Cordelia, father probably wouldn't say this strongly because he favoured her 100 per cent, so I want to say it on his behalf.

Cordelia, father isn't the type of person who buys gifts for his children. So don't go thanking him with a big grin in front of me. Father replied with a curt, "Yeah," but I've never received something like that from him, you know? No, it's not like I want something like that now.

For the time being, I understood that something had happened, so I immediately asked the butler about it. It seemed that the start of all this was that Cordelia had made a very cute remark to father just after I'd left home.

I was worried.

Isn't she going to be a little devil in the future?

If she did that unconsciously, then she would definitely be one, but if she did it intentionally, then she had an evil disposition. I wanted to question whether she was really a child.

But despite my worries, the butler told me about Cordelia, "She's brimming with curiosity. She really likes books and would often confine herself to the library." He also said to me about how flustered the tutor would get because Cordelia would ask him questions outside of the tutor's expertise.

Incidentally, the tutor she had now was different from the tutor she had before. The previous tutor couldn't respond to the knowledge that Cordelia sought.

Cordelia, who I hadn't met in a long time, acquired the etiquettes of a young lady. Although her childish way of speaking was still there, she was raised into an intelligent child that spoke almost as eloquently as me. A visitor had said, "Your daughter really resembles you, Earl." But did being like that mean that she resembled father? It was ominous.

There probably weren't many children who joined in talks about the tax system. Was elder brother like that when he was younger? At least, I was different.

In any case, Cordelia was no longer a regular lady.

Then she grew up, still smart, and before I'd noticed, she'd turned eight.

However, she was still a child even though she was smart.

Cordelia liked to read books and would also observe the plants in the garden if she received permission to do so, and her appearance while doing so were quite impressive.

She would observe the butterflies in amazement, or glance restlessly at her surroundings to make sure no one was around before pulling petals off flowers. She showed behaviour that wasn't appropriate for her age.

Our garden was quite big so she wouldn't get bored. When I observed her from the second floor, I felt as if I was gazing at a small animal.

Also, whenever I decided to go for a ride, she would look at me enviously; although she tried not to show it. So I couldn't help but ask, "Do you want to come along too?" ———; but I regretted it as soon as I'd said it. Even if I asked her on the day I was going, it wasn't something that Cordelia could decide on her own. In the first place, even if I'd asked beforehand, there was no way father would merely give her permission. I reflected on asking a question that couldn't be answered ———; but I never thought that I would really take Cordelia with me, yes.

Furthermore, father sent me a letter saying, 『If something happens to Cordelia, remember that you won't get away with it (translated) 』 and there was an underlying tone that stated; if I had time, I would actually like to take her there myself.

Scary, it's really terrifying.

Father was busy because he's too talented and a constant stream of work came to him. It wasn't my fault at all.

When father was younger..... he injured his right arm protecting His Majesty the King, before he got married. Thereupon, he quit as a knight and became a civil official; but even now, he still maintained a level that was difficult for ordinary people to attain. His skills were still at the point where it would probably be impossible for knights to even scratch my left-handed father. *Father, you're right-handed, you know? It's unbelievable, isn't it?* But his strength was staggering. Also, only his martial arts

received a handicap, his magic hadn't waned at all. He was so strong that even I, who people called a promising man, only had a 30% chance of winning against him. *But I think that my environment was extravagant since I could spar with that kind of father.* However, a lot of courage was necessary to ask him to spar with me.

Well..... I didn't want father to know I thought like that. If he found out, he'd hit me more. He was really serious. However, I did want to see father's golden days.

And yeah, I also received a letter from such a scary father and went home while having little hope that Cordelia would change her mind.

However, I slipped up again there.

I should have known that mother hadn't met with Cordelia if I'd used my brain a little.

Unlike Cordelia, I have met mother. When she saw me, she said, "I'm delighted you don't resemble that person." Mother met with my sister, who also resembled her, and me, but she didn't meet my brother who resembled father.

I didn't think... Mother hates father. She seemed somewhat obsessed with him. Therefore, she kept her distance from brother, who resembled father, probably because he associated with father. Thus the same thing could be said about Cordelia. It was also highly likely that, unlike brother, mother couldn't stomach Cordelia because father doted on her. If mother wanted father's attention, then she could just approach him herself. *I wonder what her intentions are.* Well, mother forced grandfather to enact the marriage so her personality, and the fact that father accepted even though he wasn't interested in romance, were both problematic. *I wonder what they're both thinking.*

I had that kind of background knowledge so I could see mother not wanting to meet Cordelia if I used my brain, but I was unable to think since Cordelia looked so cute trying to tiptoe up to me. I could also imagine mother acting like that to Cordelia since father had opened up his heart to her.

I quickly bluffed and left, but I thought about what I would do if she said that she wanted to meet mother. Of course, I can get them to meet each other, but mother's response would be scary at that time.

If possible, I didn't want Cordelia to get hurt. So I had to somehow get her to not be interested in me having contact with mother ———.

That was what I thought, but when I met Cordelia the next morning, she made no mentions of it at all.

The only things she said were, 'I'm looking forward to the ride' and 'I want to go to the forest to harvest plants so I would like to ask the family carriage to follow behind us'———; It appeared that she was pretending that the conversation about mother yesterday didn't happen. It was very convenient for me, but on the other hand, it made me feel uncomfortable.

Since Cordelia could talk about economics, there's no way she forgot about the conversation we had in just one night, right? Her memory isn't bad. It was okay if she really didn't care, but on the contrary, I felt like I've caused her to worry.

What are you doing, making a child worry, you?

But well, it was convenient for me, and I called out to my sister so that we could depart.

Cordelia was really excited at seeing my favourite horse, with his dark bay, white nose and socks. "He's beautiful, he seems smart," she said. He was indeed 'beautiful', but my favourite horse didn't seem smart. He was smart. Of course, I didn't say that out loud.

She was surprised at how high the horse was, but she was quite brave and didn't say that it was scary at all; she seemed rather impressed by it. I thought that was favourable and tried to raise the speed of the horse to a certain extent. I loved the feeling of wind on my skin, so I wanted Cordelia to experience it too if she wasn't scared. My favourite horse also loved galloping like that.

She seemed surprised at first, but then she started to enjoy it straight away. *I'm glad.*

Also, this child's sense of balance was good. She didn't get in my way at all when I lifted her onto the horse. She probably wouldn't ever hold one, but I thought she would act the same if I gave her a sword.

The forest which Cordelia said she wanted to go to was a slopey mountain relatively close to the Royal Capital and monsters rarely appeared there.

I removed my favourite horse's saddle and bridle and gently patted his back; then he went off to play. My beloved horse, who would come back at a single whistle, really liked to play around. I usually enjoyed observing him, but today I was Cordelia's escort. I couldn't just leave her alone and watching her was also fun, so I didn't mind. Also, I would become an unreliable brother if I didn't listen to my sister's first request.

Cordelia picked up some weeds, inhaled their scent, tilted her head in confusion and then tried restlessly to activate some magic that she'd memorised. The person in question didn't seem to realise this, but she seemed more carefree since there no one from the house was around except for me. She seemed to be having lots of fun.

So I playfully asked her, "Did you find something good?"

"There is lavender blooming here. Over there is peppermint. They're more lustrous than the ones delivered to the house. They're definitely more vibrant in the mornings, aren't they?"

Cordelia said and happily informed me, "This is lemon balm..... It's *Melissa officinalis*. If you tread on it..... See, Onii-sama! The scent drifts about!"

If she was this happy about it, then it was worth bringing her here.

"In the early mornings, the magic power stored in plants is at its peak. At any rate, you're very knowledgeable with plants, aren't you? Do you want to be a scholar?"

Cordelia's eyes popped out with astonishment at that question.

"A scholar? They're amazing; scholars are those who are smart."

Yes, Cordelia. You're smart enough.

I thought that, but I didn't dare say it out loud. If she was just embarrassed, then I might have been able to say more, but she was waving her hands around as if it was a preposterous thing, so it would be boorish of me to say any more than that..... Also, my sister looked very cute when she was panicking. Well, she was usually cute anyway.

Then as I continued to gaze at her, she moved further away and told me the name of a new grass, "Onii-sama, it's amazing! There's sage here!"

Initially, the Pameradia House's magic was compatible with flowers, so it wasn't surprising for her to be interested in plants.

However, that was for showy flowers..... For example, it was still normal if she were interested in Casa Blanca, or flowers like orchids; but she was interested in mere weeds, which was a bit strange.

She was interested in plants that looked like grass, such as peppermint and lemon palm. If it were poisonous plants, then I could understand why she was interested in them, but I couldn't understand why she was interested in these types of grass. I pretended to know what it was, but this was the first time I've heard of lemon balm.

Incidentally, I was extremely knowledgeable about poisonous plants. Although I couldn't compare to father and elder brother, I could also use the Pameradia House's manipulation magic. My field of expertise, which made the best use of my magic, was distilling poisons. Refining unproblematic weeds into powerful medicines were possible. I didn't intend to exploit my power, but it was essential to know how to detoxify similar poisons.

But it was a fact that we couldn't say anything about this magic to people outside of the family ——; no, it didn't mean that the patriarch would tell the truth to a family member just because they'd noticed it. He also never told me this orally. One would typically notice this if they used magic frequently, but it seemed that Cordelia hadn't realised it yet.

However, I had the desire to show Cordelia, who knew so much about plants, my older brother side, and I also wanted to show her my seniority. It wasn't like I only knew about poisonous plants, and I knew this forest way better than Cordelia did.

"Come, Cordelia. I'll show you a rare flower in this mountain."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Cordelia came closer to me, and I lifted her up. I walked a little away from our spot to a spring. The water sparkled under the sun's rays, and my favourite horse also came to play.

And then around the spring was ——

"Marigold?! Onii-sama, they're marigold, aren't they!?!"

Yes, Cordelia very excited about the blooming marigold surrounding the spring.

Marigold, which was called 'Flower of the Sun' in this kingdom, only bloomed during certain seasons when brought into the city, but it bloomed all year round in this mountain. It was probably related to

the magic waves, so it was possible for it to bloom all year round if the Pameradia House tried to cultivate it.

More importantly, I was a little discouraged when I showed her this hidden treasure, and she'd guessed the name so quickly. "Onii-sama is amazing!" She'd said, but if possible, I wanted to teach her the name of this flower.



Well, if she was pleased about it, then there was nothing better.

“Onii-sama, you’re amazing! You’re like a doctor [1]!”

To begin with, it was impossible to be offended because she knew the name when she said something like that. I wasn’t blessed with the chance to tell her the name of the flower, but my dignity as an older brother seems to be intact, which meant that the result was alright.

But, Cordelia.

Why are you trying to stack such a large amount of it onto our family carriage which had just arrived? You even put the surrounding soil and roots into there.

“It’s still not enough, so I’ll probably ask them to make a lot of round-trips here.” She said.

What the heck are you planning to do with it?

The magic in this mountain would immediately regrow the marigold even if she pulled out enough to fill the carriage multiple times. At any rate, they’re just weeds. They had a lot of willpower. Therefore, I don’t think it would be a problem in the mountain, but I don’t think it would flourish on their own if she brought it back to the Royal Capital, which held very little magic.

But when I tried to ask her, she said, “Is that Chamomile.....?” She’d found a new grass and was walking towards it, so I didn’t get the chance to ask my question.

But well, it was fine. She’d probably do something interesting, and the grass didn’t look dangerous. Children had active imaginations so she might come up with something.

Besides, “I will definitely give Onii-sama something as thanks for today, so please look forward to it!”

She exclaimed something so cute. I smiled and nodded while patting her head because I couldn’t think of an adult-like response.

↑1 She’s talking about him being an expert, like someone with a PhD

Act 04: An Encounter with a Potential Collaborator

It was several days after Cordelia's outing with Isma.

A lot of herbs had been transplanted into Cordelia's greenhouse. In addition to lavender, mint and lemon balm, which she'd heard about beforehand, there was also marigold, which Isma told her about, and furthermore chamomile, etc. that were all neatly lined up.

The phrase 『I'm satisfied』 might have been used at such times.

Then, when the plants were transferred, the greenhouse had been expanded a little.

Surrounded by those flowers, Cordelia began investigating the whereabouts of the next plant that she wanted to get her hands on, in a book she'd brought out from the library. In truth, she wanted to immediately start refining the essential oils; however, since the plants she brought back weren't recognised as common medicinal plants, the Pameradia House's current analysis magician was in the middle of investigating them for the presence of danger. In brief, the plants were in custody, and she had free time on her hands.

However, it was very convenient for Cordelia that they were being analysed. She had knowledge from her previous life, so she knew their effects and how to use them in an unsavoury way, but she still hadn't grasped the relation between that and a plant's magic. She was thankful that it was being analysed to avoid danger. It would be even better if they also investigated if adding magic gave them the same effects as the plants in her previous life.

For example: peppermint improved psychoneurotic symptoms such as drowsiness and lack of concentration, as well as improves anorexia, calming effects, and so on; lemon balm improved nerve pains caused by anxiety, insomnia and migraines; chamomile helped with stiff shoulders and back pains; lavender improved nerve fatigues, neurogenic gastritis and sleeping disorders, and then marigold, which Isma told her about, improved dermatitis.

She wrote the primary uses for the plants, but the analysis magician, who had received it, looked grim.

It seemed that investigating that was way more difficult than examining for toxicity.

Incidentally, the analysis magician was called Ronnie; he came to the Parmeradia House two years prior and was an amateur magician. Cordelia had nominated him herself, and the reason for that was merely because he was the youngest. She knew that she was trying to do something outside of conventional wisdom, so she thought someone young, who looked unconventional, would be good..... Of course, there were also veteran magicians with flexible thinking among the Parmeradia House's magicians..... or so she thought, but if they were too much of a veteran then Cordelia, herself, would shrink back.

However, the head magician disapproved of Cordelia's nomination. She said, "Ronnie is a very extraordinary magician, but he is a complete amateur when it comes to etiquette, so it's a little problematic to get him to help Ojou-sama,"

However, for Cordelia, since they would be at home, if he had the ability then no one would care that much if his speech was somewhat crude. Also, if it were someone she'd know for a long time, then it would be more comfortable if they weren't formal.

"But..... Ronnie looked like he was having a lot of fun, even though he said it was difficult."

Was his usual job not interesting? Cordelia thought questioningly while closing the book she'd been reading. Then, she proceeded to write down the name of a place onto a piece of paper she had on hand.

"I'll procure rosemary next if I can. Then I want to drink it with white wine. Though, the current me still can't drink."

It seemed that there were no age restrictions on drinking in this kingdom. To be accurate, drinking outside was allowed after one became an adult, but there didn't seem to be any laws on drinking inside of the house. However, with her current body size, she'd probably get drunk really quickly.

That wouldn't be good. She couldn't show disgraceful behaviours.

If nothing happened then, that would be great, but 『Cordelia's』 body was extremely weak against alcohol. She would be extremely embarrassed if she went from being a happy drinker to a weepy one.

"..... I'd like an alcohol patch test before I become an adult. But, I could still drink until my thirst is quenched if I was an adult." [1]

Cordelia thought that while putting the pen down and concluded that she should make pencils, sooner or later. She was used to using pens, but she missed the sensation of writing with a pencil. *Selling them together with erasers might be useful* ——; she thought things like that while reviewing the paper she'd just written.

"But..... I wonder if I could 『probably』 procure rosemary. As far as the literature is concerned, it's unclear whether it could be found in this kingdom or not."

If she had seen the real thing before, then she could definitely get her hands on it, but if she wanted them to be in 『good』 condition, then that might be hard.

Rosemary was a herb commonly used in cooking, even in this country. That was why Cordelia thought that it would be easy for her to procure it, but she found out that the ones used in cooking were all dry herbs, imported from foreign kingdoms. Moreover, they weren't precisely importing rosemary, it was just a cushioning ingredient that was imported together with eggs. Also, the reason why the chefs of this kingdom adopted rosemary in their cooking was that they became accustomed to using rosemary along with the eggs they had imported, and thus applied it to other dishes as well.

However, rosemary, which was used as a 『high class cushioning ingredient』, couldn't be called a popular ingredient. In short, she needed to obtain stock and make dry rosemary herself.

(According to the book I'd read, it doesn't seem like 『they use rosemary as a cushioning material because they grow so much that it rots』 I wonder if the price is being raised due to a set commercial law; or is it being treated as a vanity case? Either way, it isn't a big problem.)

Cordelia also read in a book that rosemary also grew wildly in the mountains of this kingdom. However, details of the state of rosemary weren't written down; all that was written down was 『the fragrance is inferior to the imported ones』. She wondered how inferior the smell was..... The point was that she concluded that she needed to urgently confirm the real article since it wasn't possible to determine whether the stock was terrible, or if the growing situation was bad, or if it wasn't fresh enough, or if they have a lousy drying method. She wanted to get her hand on the foreign stock, but even then, she didn't think she would understand anything if she didn't have anything to compare it with.

However, the book that mentioned rosemary was written about 100 years prior, and she didn't know how similar it was to the current situation.

(This is a problem.)

It wasn't just rosemary, she thought that the information she could gain from the book would soon be exhausted since only a little was written on each herb. Thus she began to think that she should acquire books from other kingdoms as well. At the same time, she thought that she should research more on traditional cuisines, and instances of the use of medicinal plants in the folk remedies of those kingdoms. Fortunately, her basic education lectures had been progressing well, and she only had to take lessons in the morning now. Since her afternoons were free, she wanted to learn foreign languages while examining medicinal herbs. If she did that, then she would be able to read foreign literature, and it might help collect information. In any case, it wouldn't be disadvantageous if she'd learnt it.

(I should consult with father next time.)

He probably wouldn't be opposed to it, but she'd need a tutor for that, too. She had qualms about reading, writing or speaking foreign languages, but since she needed it, she had no choice but to challenge herself. If she started the challenge..... then she could picture herself desperately memorising everything because 『There was no way a bad report could be given to father』. *Yup, it's okay. Probably.*

In any case, her top priority was to visit the places where rosemary seemed likely to grow and acquire stock. Then she wanted to look at its condition while examining it in the greenhouse. It was also the same for the other herbs; she didn't want to just grow them in the greenhouse, she wanted to cultivate a lot of herbs in a large plantation. Given the research period for that, the sooner she got her hands on rosemary the better.

“Should I get Onii-sama to take me to the destination again? But in truth, Onii-sama probably wants to let his horse run faster..... If that's the case, then I'll just get in his way, wouldn't I?”

Cordelia was in doubt and sighed.

She wanted to quickly be able to ride by herself. However, it was difficult for her to receive permission to go out just to ride a horse. She also needed to learn how to use offensive magic for self-defence. Should she increase her magic classes?

“It would be difficult to ask for offensive magic while I'm aiming to be a lady. I also have a feeling that it would be impossible for me to insist that it's for self-defence. In the first place, it's not something

you could learn overnight..... Which meant, I have to consult with the head chef again about rosemary.”

The head chef’s enthusiasm and sincerity for cooking were so strong that he wouldn’t lose against anyone in that aspect. Therefore, if she insisted on the possibility of the existence of high-quality rosemary, then she felt that he would help her search for a way to obtain it. No, he would most definitely lend her a hand. Also, since he negotiated directly with merchants for ingredients, he might be able to present her with a way to procure it.

(Alright, let’s try to talk to the head chef.)

She thought as she sipped on her tea.

I also want to establish different types of herbal teas in the future; but like I expect, would the people of this kingdom, who are accustomed to the taste of black tea, accept herbal tea? Would it be easier for them to accept if I sold it as healthy food?

Before she’d noticed, the inside of Cordelia’s head was always filled with medicinal herbs.

Just like that, Cordelia spent her days in a relatively relaxed manner, until Ronnie’s analysis was over. But one day, a sharp turning point came.

Emina usually took care of Cordelia, and never disturbed her, but on that day she came up to Cordelia with a nervous look on her face. She explained, “Marquis Flantheim has come to visit with his son,” while she quickly dressed Cordelia in a fancy dress that she wouldn’t usually wear.

I see it seems that I’ll be showing myself in front of Marquis-sama and his son.

However, up until then, she’d never been called whenever Elvis had visitors. There were times when she’d met them by chance while walking around the mansion, and they’d ask her if she’d like to join them for tea, “Ojou-san do you want to have tea with us?” But this was the first time she’d been called. *Why are they calling me this time?* Moreover, she couldn’t understand the reason, even more so, because the guest was Marquis Flantheim.

The Flantheim House was a family that contributed to the founding of the nation and were written about in history books. Even in general education, they would definitely teach about the history of that House. Even amongst the limited number of Marquises, their house name was at the top of the list.

Cordelia still had her doubts, but she was already on her way to the parlour. There were two men and a boy in front of her when she entered the room, urged by Emina. One was, of course, her own good-looking father, but it was her first time meeting the other two; the Flantheim father and son. The Marquis was a gentle-looking man while the boy had big, round eyes.

Cordelia confirmed their appearances and curtsied.

“My name is Cordelia Enna Pameradia. It’s a pleasure making your acquaintance.”

That she was able to greet elegantly without hesitation was the results of her daily training. Even if she looked young, she had confidence in her correct posture and correct pronunciation, which had been ingrained into her down to the bone.

Although her father tended to spoil his daughter, he was a former knight, so he was rather strict about etiquette. In practice, even if Cordelia had received a passing mark from her tutor, her father would give candid advice many times. “The angle’s not good.”

However, her father didn’t move a single eyebrow at Cordelia’s curtsy today. *Seems like I passed. Well done, me.*

In response to Cordelia’s greeting, Marquis Flantheim gave one big nod and with a gentle aura and an equally soft voice said, “Yes.”

“I apologise for the sudden intrusion. I am Leonard Flantheim. This is my son, Vernoux. You two are the same age.”

At that, Cordelia once again pinched the hem of her skirt and curtsied again. However, contrary to her flowy motions, Cordelia’s heart was jumping. She was able to hide her surprise and smile loosely.

The boy’s name had been too unexpected.

(Vern...oux?)

When she’d heard that name, she once again replayed it in her mind and felt as if she could scream.

The name matched the name of a character that’d appeared in the game.

He got entangled with the heroine in the city, and his surname didn’t appear until the end. However, his name was of course shown; the heroine always called him “Vernoux-sama”. Cordelia remembered that the fact that he was the son of a marquis house that had come up during a conversation, but she’d never expected to meet him at her house. “*Why are you here?!*” She praised herself for not yelling.

However, impatience was a taboo.

She remembered it well. Vernoux was undoubtedly a friendly character towards the heroine, but even so, he wasn’t someone that she should be wary of. Cordelia calmed her throbbing heart, as she heard her own heartbeat.

Yes, no matter how much the person appeared in the game, Vernoux should be someone unrelated to Cordelia. 『Cordelia』 was a character who was only interested in the Prince (and the woman involved with the Prince). Therefore, there wasn’t a scenario where she was involved with Vernoux. Of course, since the game was set in high society, there was a chance that they were mutually acquainted. However, there were no events in which they actually made contact with each other.

That was why he was a completely safe person ———; or so she’d like to say, but it wasn’t like she had no need for concern at all. He was the Prince’s school friend. Moreover, they had a perfect friendship. According to the options, he was such good friends with the Prince that he could mediate between him and the heroine.

In short, Cordelia didn’t know when he might become a threat.

(... He’s probably already met with the Prince. I guess it’s better to avoid him after all.)

If I get involved with him, I can't help but feel that the danger of possibly getting involved with the Prince would somewhat rise.

A normal noble lady might be pleased if that happened, but Cordelia was different.

Something like getting close to the person I must avoid; no thanks.

She couldn't let it show on her face, even if she only thought that for a moment. In the first place, she had to entertain her guests no matter what she thought. Since that was the case, she postponed her thinking until later.

Cordelia once again curtsied at Vernoux. However, Vernoux continued to look at her as if he was looking at something slightly unusual. His behaviour wasn't like that of a Marquis's son. He didn't correct his expression until he was prompted to by the Marquis.

“..... I'm Vernoux Flantheim. Nice to meet you.”

Vernoux opened his mouth and said that in a childish and loveable voice; utterly different from his silence up until then. That went with his expression. He was probably cuter than the girls in the area..... Even so, that was the first time she'd seen another child other than herself, in that world.

In the game, he was a young man with sharp eyes. Right now, he was a boy who only suited the word 『cute』. But, if she looked closely, she indeed felt that there were definitely parts to him that would transform to become manly in the future. Perhaps because the Marquis, standing next to him, was looking at him with such eyes. She also recalled that, in the game, his voice was a lot lower but sweet. When she thought that, she could certainly hear the remnants of it in his current voice.

(..... It's a strange concept to say that something in the future is a remnant.)

Cordelia recalled information in that way, while still being a little wry; she then sat down prompted by Elvis and examined the Marquis father and son pair.

“Elvis and I are old friends, you see.” The Marquis opened his mouth while Cordelia was sitting down.

Cordelia was a bit surprised at those words. She'd never heard about this friendship from Elvis. She seldom heard about his interests..... But in any case, it seemed the Elvis and the Marquis were childhood friends. Even if Elvis showed an annoyed face, it must be so, since the Marquis had said so. There might be various adult circumstances around it.

In fact, Elvis didn't hide his annoyed expression, but he also didn't tell them to 『go home』. Furthermore, he might have already said that to them, but they didn't go home, or he knew it was pointless to say it..... He had that kind of expression on his face, so he must have trusted the Marquis more than average.

(There's a thin line between love and hate..... It's the same as that, I'm sure of it.)

Cordelia decided to stop thinking too profoundly and concluded.

(But, what kind of intentions did he have to bring his childhood friend's son and his own daughter together?)

Cordelia thought and arrived at a conclusion.

Which was, this was probably a 『marriage interview [2] 』.

(Eh, it couldn't be that my fiancé would be decided at 8 years old, during our first meeting..... Could it?)

Cordelia broke into cold sweat.

I know. It isn't uncommon to get engaged at 8 in this world, but I had said that I wanted to become father's bride. So this can't be. I'm not getting engaged, right? I want to think that I'm not.

However, Cordelia's worries ended in needless anxiety. Instead, she was stuck with listening to a terrifyingly passionate story. It was the Marquis's own love story, which was probably too complicated for 8-year-old children to understand; the story took so long that the tea in front of them had gone cold. At any rate, it was a long story, full of love, and she was tired of having to force a smile on her face. Moreover, the way he was speaking was as if he was the main lead in a play. Also, he wasn't a smart actor, like his beautiful looks indicated, but an extremely hot-blooded one.

The story was so long that Cordelia only listened until about halfway, but she knew that the Marquis treasured his wife from the bottom of his heart... Or so she felt. *Maybe I could understand a tenth..... No, a hundredth of the Marquis's hot..... Pardon me, passion.* That was why she never said what she thought, *being loved that much seems heavy.*

(That's right..... I'm still a child, so there's no way I would understand. Let's leave it that way.....)

Neither Elvis, who clearly had a disgusted look on his face, nor Vernoux, who was only interested in the confectionary, seem like they were listening to the Marquis's speech, but neither of them disrupted the Marquis's feverish speech. So before Cordelia, who was forcing a smile on her face, the Marquis was able to continue his solo performance peacefully until the end. "Love has worth only because the feelings of two people are the same!" Cordelia was tired but more than anything else, she was glad that he seemed extremely happy.

When Cordelia began to wonder if that was why they called her here, the Marquis calmly concluded.

"If you also find someone you like, then you should do everything you can to get them. It would be good for you to remember that well."

With that assumption, you can steal them away!? Also, was that something to preach to an 8-year-old?!

Cordelia wanted to smile wryly, but from his speech, she understood the Marquis was probably not someone who forced their child into any engagement without giving them a say in the matter. Also, at least, the Flantheim House was free from political marriages while they remained on active service as a Marquis.

If Vernoux said that he wanted to get married to Cordelia, then the Marquis's spirits would probably rise, but from what she could see, he didn't seem interested in anything other than confectionaries.

Yes, children were like that.

In this situation, it didn't seem like they would say something like 『We're childhood friends, and their ages are close to each other so let's engage them together』. Cordelia was relieved and stroked her chest.

That's great. I don't want a fiancé or anything right now.

Even if Vernoux became her fiancé, the path to her downfall would not be opened..... Probably. In terms of it being inconvenient or not, she could say that it was not. However, she wanted to be spared from getting engaged while still being inexperienced with first love. Since she was already at it, she wanted to experience love too, if possible. Although it was a tale that was still far into the future, she couldn't even imagine that at that moment, so she got embarrassed thinking about it too deeply.

Beside Cordelia, who was like that, her father let out a bitter voice.

“Your love story is nothing more than a climax that's been reached and little bits and pieces.”

Elvis said that while raising his hand lightly and urged the servant with his eyes to exchange the tea that had gone cold because of the Marquis's passionate speech. Elvis complained, “Do you remember how much trouble I went through because of you,” “I aged three years because of that,” “Don't forget who cleaned up afterwards,” and “You often barged in on people who have been up all night.” But the Marquis just brushed him off. It seemed that Elvis had to endure some great hardships.

However, Elvis, who was particular about etiquette, was cursing the Marquis without hesitation. They both either knew each other well, or they owed each other too much to care. She wanted to hear more about it, but she firmly endured and smiled. She could clearly see that if she heard about it, Elvis's mood would drop.

It seemed the Vernoux, who had only been eating confectionaries, had noticed that the speech was over.

Even though he was already bored of hearing that story many times, and hadn't listened to what the Marquis said at all, he had already returned to his beautiful appearance that had been broken before.

The Pameradia House.....No, most probably, normal nobles wouldn't break their posture, even if they weren't interested in the conversation until it was over; but that wasn't the case with the Flantheim father and son. Or perhaps the Marquis had been so passionate that he didn't notice it. If that was the case, then Vernoux was extremely intelligent. *Let's remember that.....* Cordelia thought, and Vernoux looked at Cordelia and smiled.

“Hey, you have a greenhouse, right? Show me.”

... Was it my imagination?

She had seen both sides of his previous attitude up close, but she felt that his appearance was different from that of an obedient child. To be more accurate, it seemed like he had a hidden side to him.

She felt that he was someone she should possibly be wary of, whether he was connected with the Prince or not, and said, “I will guide you.”

He was someone she wanted to be on her guard around, but she also wished to get away from the adult conversations. Cordelia guided Vernoux to the greenhouse before the Marquis could recite his love story once more.

It seemed that the greenhouse that they'd arrived at was beyond Vernoux's imagination.

He walked curiously around the greenhouse, and when he saw the peppermint he muttered in wonder, "What kind of plant is this? Will some kind of beautiful flower bloom from it?"

However, she was still in the research phase, so even if she could give him the plant's name, it would be difficult to provide him with a detailed explanation..... Or rather, Cordelia was concerned whether it would be good to deepen their friendship. Therefore she smiled vaguely and dodged the question. In the first place, she didn't want to tell anyone about it, since she hadn't even started her research.

However, at that time, Vernoux's round eyes narrowed a little.

"You're a strange one."

Resembling his father, in the near future ———; In short, Vernoux spewed those words at Cordelia with an aura that resembled his game self a little.

Cordelia wanted to return those same words back to him. Vernoux wasn't normal. Even his actions from before seemed very cunning. However, she restrained herself, tilted her head in confusion and answered him as if she didn't have a clue what he was talking about, "..... Are you talking about my actions?"

Then just like before, Vernoux stated his pure opinion.

"Yeah. You're just like a man!"

Cordelia, 8 years old.

She received shocking words for the first time in her life, in spite of being born, raised and educated beautifully.



She didn't know about when she was a Japanese person, but she had already been living here for eight years. She understood that men and women acted differently in this world. She was aware that she wasn't that normal when she was conducting her research, but she didn't let it show in her appearance. She didn't have any intentions of acting strong-willed enough to be told that by a boy who'd she just met for the first time.

Nevertheless, her face didn't twitch, because as expected, she had been raised as a young lady.

Similarly, Vernoux was also a noble and should have also learnt how to treat ladies, to some extent. Or rather, he would hear about it even if he didn't want to, with such a father. Nevertheless to say such a thing..... Cordelia thought that other young ladies would surely cry if he told that to them, but, since this was Vernoux, it wouldn't be easy for him to think that other young ladies acted like a man. That was precisely why he described Cordelia as 『strange』.

Vernoux kept his eyes on the peppermint and continued, "Because you see, other young ladies would stare at me and then their faces would turn red. Your reaction, it's just the same as a boy's."

"..... I'm very sorry about that."

"I don't mind. On the contrary, it seems like you can act like yourself."

His mischievous laugh was befitting of his age, and he was no longer the hard to deal with boy from earlier.

Seeing him like that, Cordelia, too, relaxed her shoulders a bit.

Somehow or another, he doesn't seem like someone who I should be that cautious around like I'd thought. On the contrary, I was the only one being cautious.

"Vernoux-sama, do you visit the houses of young ladies often?"

"Occasionally. It's a hassle, but according to father, I won't have a big romance if I don't meet them."

"..... That is certainly so, isn't it."

Indeed, if he was searching for the great romance that the Marquis spoke about, then he first needed to meet his destined person. If he didn't have many encounters, then such a stunning meeting wouldn't happen ——; Cordelia wanted to look off into the distance, but strongly resisted and agreed. Not surprisingly, Vernoux, who had honestly said, "It's a hassle," was still not interested in romance yet. He might have had enough of being brought around everywhere.

(It's hard to have a father who had a great love, isn't it.....)

Cordelia secretly sympathised with Vernoux in her mind.

"By the way, you said that you wanted to see this..... Vernoux-sama, are you interested in flowers?"

"Honestly, not really. But if you can control the temperature, then you can raise birds from the southern kingdoms..... Well, it's not like I don't want them."

So that was it, he probably wanted to go to the greenhouse to get away from the parlour. But Cordelia got unforeseen information from him when she raised the topic.

“There’s also talk about making something similar to this at the Royal Castle, too. It seems like the Queen wished for it and the Prince also seems interested in it.”

“..... You’re well informed.”

“That’s because I study together with His Highness.”

As expected, he was already acquainted with the Prince and, judging from the way he spoke, they already got along really well.

That fact strengthened the caution that Cordelia had loosened for a moment. She didn’t do this consciously, she’d only reacted unconsciously to the danger word 『Prince』. However, Vernoux didn’t hesitate to tell her about the Prince; so it was probably safer to avoid him after all. She didn’t hate him, but to her regret, that connection was dreadful. Her life was at stake.

However, while she thought that, Cordelia suddenly noticed a reverse possibility.

Vernoux knew the Prince’s tendencies and would be a useful source of information for her to avoid the Prince with. *Was there a better way to avoid the Prince than to hear about him from someone who is close to him? Instead, wouldn’t getting closer to Vernoux be a good plan?*

(He might become an existence like a joker, though.....)

She was thinking about such things, so her expression became just a little serious.

Vernoux just stared at Cordelia, who was acting like that, and he slowly softened his expression.

“..... You’re really unusual, aren’t you?”

“What is unusual about me?”

“Aren’t you interested in the Prince?”

“..... Why would you say that?”

It wasn’t like she wasn’t interested, it was just that her interest was the opposite of 『wanting to get close』.

Cordelia returned Vernoux’s question with a question. However, his amused expression remained the same.

“Everyone would immediately react to the word, ‘Prince’. No matter if they are noble boys or girls. Even though they turn red when looking at me, they would persistently try to get close to me. For some reason, you seem different from them.”

Hearing those words, Cordelia felt even sorrier for him than she did when she heard that the Marquis brought him around because of his love story.

Under normal circumstances, he was the heir to that Flantheim House. She could imagine that he had a comfortable position just from looking at his outward appearance. Moreover, if he were used not only for that but also as a foothold towards the Prince, then he’d have something to be dissatisfied about. It

might be because of that, that she was able to catch a glimpse of a calculated front, different from innocence, despite him being young.

“Well..... I respect His Majesty’s regime, but I haven’t talked with His Highness..... Also,”

“Also?”

“My father seems like a more wonderful man to me than His Highness, whom I have never seen before.”

Cordelia laughed, and Vernoux nodded looking convinced.

“Indeed, I really can’t seem to understand a woman’s heart. It’s too complicated. But it’s easy to talk with you; if you ever have something you would like to talk about, it would be great if you can come to me for advice.”

“Same here. Please treat me kindly from now on.”

“Would you mind if I called you Dilly?”

“By all means.”

Thus, Cordelia succeeded in making a connection with a promising future friend of the Prince. Of course, she didn’t have any intentions of using him only as an information shop. If he said that he wanted to understand the thing called a woman’s heart, then she thought about giving him advice, anytime. Unfortunately, she didn’t have any experience in love, but she didn’t dislike listening to love stories..... However, whether she could be helpful or not was a different story. However, she felt that his experiences would be disastrous if his love standards were influenced by that Marquis’s story. Thus it would certainly be useful to listen to 『the advice of others』 when he felt lost. However, she felt that it was necessary for Vernoux to generally understand a woman’s heart.

“But I really think that it would be better if the goddess statues in this greenhouse were a bit more voluptuous. It’s the Goddess of Fertility, isn’t it?”

..... She definitely thought that it was imperative to teach this eight-year-old child about a woman’s heart.

“Vernoux-sama, do you know that in this world there is a word called modesty?”

(Being an honest child is good, but being too honest could also be a fault.)

Cordelia shrugged her shoulders at her childish but grown-up friend.

↑1 An alcohol patch test is similar to an allergy patch test, but supposedly reveals alcohol tolerance: <https://www.waseda.jp/top/en-news/26324>

↑2 omiai

Act 05: Attempting the Trial Product

A few days after she'd gotten acquainted with Vernoux, Cordelia tried to talk to the head chef about the matter regarding rosemary.

If she could get her hands on rosemary in its fresh state, then she should be able to make a superior version of the dried rosemary being sold at the markets. She wanted to get her hands on them, grow them and increase the amount. Then, she wanted the head chef to make the best cuisine from it; or so she tried to ask.

Without delay, the head chef accepted those words; which came off as overly self-conscious for a small child. He also promised that he would obtain stock for her from abroad.

As a matter of fact, it seemed that the head chef, who had only seen dried rosemary before, had obtained a potted rosemary sapling in the past. He wanted to prepare the materials to make the best dish. He wholeheartedly tried towards that goal. However, perhaps because of magic-related reasons, the rosemary wasn't able to take root properly and soon withered away. Therefore, he frankly told Cordelia that if there were a possibility, then he would like to cooperate with her.

Hearing those words, Cordelia decided in her heart that if she could procure rosemary stock, then she would perfect the way to make good quality dried herb.

In the first place, the quality of the rosemary that she could obtain was still 'not bad', even if it couldn't be judged as good as what Cordelia saw in her previous life, she wouldn't go as far as to say that the quality was poor. Drying itself was typically done to prevent mould and would commonly be used, even if the result wasn't the one she desired.

However, common just wouldn't do. Magic, which existed in this world, was evidently reduced when drying the herbs. If magic was retained in the herb, then the results would probably be better.

The head chef said that rosemary, with a fragrance strong enough to negate stench, grew in kingdoms to the west; the ones in the east had a weaker scent and the ones planted in the north had an even weaker smell than the ones in the east. That knowledge was probably obtained due to the enthusiasm of chefs. Cordelia thought that the experience acquired by tradesmen was terrific, and at the same time, she was delighted that her plan was progressing.

"..... Well then, I'm sorry to ask this of you, but could I trouble you to obtain some rosemary from these three places; the eastern and western kingdoms, as well as our own? The rosemary from our kingdom may by no means be inferior to the others. For example, if the manner in which it is dried isn't good, it might be a splendid specimen for all we know."

"Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't know unless I see it, but I believe that comparing both would be best. What do you say?"

"Well, I think a large quantity would be difficult, but I think we should be able to get one or two relatively fast."

“Then, I’ll trouble you with that. If we consider that it would increase by time, then it shouldn’t be a problem. I’m looking forward to eating more delicious food cooked by you. After all, it’s a shame to not be able to utilise those skills of yours fully.”

While talking to the head chef in such a manner, Cordelia felt like a load had been taken off her shoulders at the promise of obtaining rosemary. It was regrettable that she might only be able to procure a small amount, but it shouldn’t be a problem if she could get her hands on them. It was possible for her to increase her stock since it was rosemary, and, if she didn’t need them immediately, then she could get her hands on more. Including cultivation, mass production could be considered in the span of a few years. Even if it turned out that the ones from the western kingdom were the best for cooking, there might be a possibility that the ones from her own kingdom would be more favourable in terms of scent. If she could get her hands on both varieties of rosemary, then it would be too much for her to want more than that.

(But, there’s no way that there are only three varieties of rosemary. Which means that there are varieties that aren’t mentioned in books, or if there really are only three kinds of variations, then I’ll need to improve them myself. If that’s the case, then it will be hard but also exciting.)

After talking with the head chef, Cordelia returned to her room, but on the way there, she witnessed the analysis magician, Ronnie, going to the main building from another, while holding a stack of books. It was an unusual sight since the analysis magician who worked at the Pameradia House, seldom showed up at the main building. He was holding books, so he’d probably borrowed magic books from the library.

“Thank you for your hard work, Ronnie.”

“Ah, Ojou-sama..... Or is it better to ask, ‘How do you do?’ at times like this?”

“Thank you for your consideration, but I don’t mind, please feel at ease.”

“Well, if you insist.”

Ronnie was, just as the head magician had said, no good with etiquette and, on top of that, he didn’t seem mind. However, Cordelia didn’t care much. It wasn’t like he was a hooligan; he handled the books with care, and his personal appearance was actually rather neat. Several times while Cordelia was talking with Ronnie, he would disclose matters of his past to her. “So I used to talk this way to the Earl, even before it was decided that I’d work here; crazy isn’t it? Now it feels more like the house ‘took’ me in.” That was to say, what Earl Pameradia looked for in a magician was their abilities and nothing else.

Ronnie spoke to Cordelia in a soft tone.

“The request from Ojou-sama looks like it’ll be finished soon.”

“Even though you were saying that it would be difficult, you work rather fast.”

“Ah, I’m not cutting corners. Don’t worry. If by chance something were to happen to Ojou-sama, I’ll be killed by the Earl.”

She couldn't tell if Ronnie was joking or being serious, but at least Cordelia didn't have to worry about him in that aspect. At any rate, Elvis hired him despite knowing that he talked like that. There was nothing to worry about in terms of his abilities.

"I'm going to the library now. Will you be joining me, Ojou-sama?"

Ronnie invited Cordelia in the same way as before; in a manner that wasn't like an employee's. Cordelia didn't really have anything she had to do and accepted Ronnie's invitation. She also had something to ask him.

"Say, Ronnie, I also want to be able to analysis plants by myself, do you think I could do it?"

"You'll be able to. Probably."

"..... You said it rather easily. But can I really do it?"

"Of course, it would be impossible now, but if it's only to analysis if the plant is poisonous or not, then you would be able to do it if you were to acquire knowledge about the world's poisons, increase your magic attribute knowledge, and then brush up on reading about plants' magical circuit..... Ojou-sama, please open the door. Both my hands are occupied."

"Here you go..... What do you mean by, 'if only'?"

"Like this time, if you want to predict 『what kind of effects it would have on the human body after processing』, then it doesn't end with just that. It would be exhausting without technical knowledge, and even if you have technical knowledge, you'll only understand if it's poisonous or not. Even if you understand the active components, you wouldn't be sure of the effects at the time of use. It is only a prediction. In practice, you have to look at the manufactured product and investigate..... After that, there are also individual differences, so a test subject would be necessary."

Ronnie said that and headed towards a bookshelf.

Cordelia understood his point. Take for example chamomile; German chamomile, itself, didn't have any anti-allergic effects, but, during its distillation, a compound called chamazulene is synthesised. When it becomes an essential oil, the anti-allergic effect manifests. In short, a chemical reaction occurs. In that case, a good outcome was produced, but in contrast, there was also a possibility that an adverse outcome could be created as well.

"I don't really mind teaching you. Analysis magic that is."

"Really?"

"Yes. Well, my ability as a tutor may be frighteningly low, and I won't be able to say for sure that Ojou-sama would be able to master it if analysis isn't your forte."

"..... Even though you were saying it so easily before, this time you're rather harsh from the start, aren't you?"

"I apologise. Besides being honest, I tend to calculate things negatively rather than positively."

Ronnie spoke nonchalantly as if he didn't think it was terrible at all.



Cordelia once again thought that the easy-going him had the aura of a 『neighbourhood onii-chan』 . She was thankful for his rude way of speaking. As an employee, his speech and conduct was by no means something to be complimented, but he was invaluable as an existence that was able to advise Cordelia.

“But, I don’t think there’s a need for you to learn something like analysis magic. There are professionals here as well, so it’s unnecessary for a novice to go out of their way to learn it. After all, there is a thing called distribution of roles, is there not? It’s not always useful, even if you could do it all by yourself.”

“For example?”

“Let’s see. For example, if Ojou-sama were able to do everything and anything by herself, then our jobs would diminish.”

“..... That’s a misunderstanding. Ronnie, your primary duties are different, aren’t they? Isn’t this extra work for you?”

“As expected of Ojou-sama. But since this is more interesting than my original job, if possible I would like to maintain the situation where I’m away from my regular work using the front of, 『because I’m doing Ojou-sama’s request』 , you see.”

Ronnie said and laughed.

“Are you returning to your room? Or going to the greenhouse? I’ll send you off.”

“..... Although those are usually words to be appreciated, since you’re the one saying them, I could only hear it as you want to skip work. Is it because of the conversation earlier?”

“Ahaha, it might be.”

Ronnie declared that, without hiding anything. Cordelia also shrugged her shoulders.

“About what we talked about earlier..... Even if it doesn’t apply to this case, I also understand that your opinion is correct.”

“What do you mean?”

“About it not being necessary to be able to do everything alone. It’s a case-by-case basis, but someone who has been conducting research for many years aside, there is a possibility that an inexperienced person, such as myself, will make decisions by themselves without being aware of any mistakes, and proceed onwards just like that..... Was what you meant, wasn’t it?”

“No, I was purely thinking of my own interests.”

“..... Oh my, is that so?”

It seemed that Ronnie was an honest person up to the point that he would correct people.

For Cordelia, living while being true to one’s emotions and words was a lot more difficult than being courteous. That wasn’t only true in her current world, but in her past life as well.

“Ojou-sama? Is there something on my face?”

“No. I’ve become a little envious of you.”

“You won’t get anything even if you flatter me, you know?”

“Nothing is fine. More importantly, you said that the analysis would be finished soon, but..... Do you already know whether it’s poisonous or not?”

“Oh, if it’s about that then it’s non-poisonous. However, that’s only for the portion that a healthy person usually uses. If it’s over that amount, then it could be medicine or poison.”

“Thank you..... I’ll head to the greenhouse now. I’ll be counting on you to continue with the analysis.”

Cordelia said as she placed a single piece of candy onto Ronnie’s hand and left the room ahead of him.

Ronnie gave a rare bow and looked joyful once she said. “It’s honey candy from Beryl.” Beryl’s honey candy was expensive; they were a high-class confectionary.

After Cordelia left Ronnie and reached the greenhouse, she earnestly began planning for the experiments to extract essential oils.

The first thing was the type of plant that the essential oils would be extracted from, but, to begin with, the choice was as good as having already been made. The only plant that Cordelia could refine essential oils from right now was peppermint.

There were three main reasons for that.

First, more essential oils could be refined from peppermint than any other herb she had on hand.

Second, there was still a lot of wild peppermint growing in the mountains. Therefore, it was possible for her to start over, even if she failed a lot.

The last reason was the issue of apparatus. If she were to use peppermint, then the appropriate extraction method was the steam distillation method. It was possible for the current her to assemble that with simple apparatuses, and the other necessary ingredient, besides herbs, would just be distilled water; which could be prepared immediately.

The steam distillation method that Cordelia was thinking about was a method of getting essential oils by evaporating the essential oils contained in the leaf by sending steam into a distillation kettle, which contained the herbs. The essential oils, which become lighter because of the steam, would rise in the kettle, together with the steam. That then passes through a connecting tube and cooled. Then, the cooled vapour condenses into liquid once again. The liquid obtained at that time would be floral water, and the film that formed on top of that would be essential oil. Incidentally, floral water would also slightly contain the components of the essential oil so it could be used separately as a toner or air freshener.

“Although I called it an apparatus..... I’m just connecting glass containers with tubes.”

Cordelia borrowed some easy to use flasks and containers from the magicians' wing and quickly started assembling the equipment. First of all, she had to set the heat source, which resembled a mini lamp or, in terms of her previous life; an alcohol lamp, and she put a conical flask on top of that for containing the distilled water. Then she plugged it and connected the tube to send the steam through, and then attached that to an air-tight container, which would become the distillation kettle to put the herbs in. Furthermore, from there she joined another two tubes to the kettle to let the steam escape. The tubes she chose for that were coiled tubes. She made them pass through a somewhat long and thin beaker-like thing, containing cold water, to cool down the stream passing through the tubes. At the bottom of the beaker was a hole, just large enough for the tube to exit, and the tube that passes through that finally reached a separating funnel. If the steam passed through the apparatus using that route, then she should be able to get floral water and essential oils without problems.

Cordelia finished assembling the apparatus and drew a deep breath. However, that was only a simple set-up; if she sought something on the level that was dealt with in her previous life, then it would be a little insufficient. Even if she could somehow adjust the temperature, there was no notion of measuring pressure in this world. However, in reverse, 『magic』 which didn't exist in her previous world, existed in this one. Cordelia believed that even if not all was the same, she could find a way as long as she didn't lose her desire to create wonderful things.

Incidentally, the method used to make essential oil from nuts, in this world, seemed close to the pressure method. In her previous life, that method was primarily used when extracting from the peels of citrus fruits, such as lemons and oranges, in which the peels were literally pressed through machines, such as rolls, and then put into a centrifugal. Unlike the steam distillation method, heat was not applied, so natural fragrance could be enjoyed. The method was somewhat different, but it was suitable for fruits such as lemon, so she also intended to research it in detail shortly.

It was nice to have a centrifuge. Still, she couldn't make a centrifuge with simple tools, like the ones she had.

“Well then, I'll take a break for a bit.....”

“Hmm, so this is Ojou-sama's work?”

“?!”

“Oh, sorry Ojou-sama. Did I surprise you?”

“..... Ronnie, you, why are you here?”

Cordelia almost screamed when Ronnie suddenly appeared, but she was able to hold it in and ask him that question.

Perhaps she had been so absorbed in her work that she hadn't noticed him entering at all.

“Well, it seemed like you'd do something, Ojou-sama. I thought it would be interesting, so of course, I came to watch. You thought about starting your experiment since you found out that they were non-poisonous, or something along those lines?”

“I didn’t intend to start the experiment..... Right then, should I try to make a prototype? Ronnie, could you bring me distilled water and ice?”

“Got it.”

The handy thing about her house was that there were a lot of magicians who conducted experiments here, so there was always a lot of distilled water and ice in stock. Cordelia saw Ronnie leave and decided to quickly make the ingredients for the experiment.

First was making the dry herbs. The reason for using dry herbs instead of fresh ones was simple; if there was extra moisture in the leaves, then the extraction wouldn’t go well.

The standard way to making dry herbs was to bundle the herbs in small amounts and hang them in well-ventilated places with no direct sunlight. However, that wouldn’t fulfil Cordelia’s desire to 『use it now』, so she decided to use an unconventional method to dry the herbs.

Which was magic.

She could shorten the time needed to make dry flowers by using the Pameradia’s magic. Of course, it wasn’t like she didn’t do any preparation at all. Cordelia repeatedly practised making dried flowers with magic, with the flowers in the garden, for the day when she could conduct her experiment.

The Pameradia’s magic, the power to interfere with plants, could amplify the powers of the plants themselves, or stimulate their rapid growth. But, of course, there were limits. In particular, making plants grow drained quite a bit of magic power. It wasn’t like it couldn’t be done, but, for example, the caster’s magic would be exhausted if they were to use magic to repeatedly harvest a wheat field endlessly. On the contrary, they might even lose their life.

However, in contrast to growth, the magic power needed for drying plants was comparatively weak. Therefore, Cordelia earnestly practised how to dry plants cleanly. Of course, she was careful not to disturb the harmony of the garden. Also, that magic didn’t just dry. She learnt magic that, while drying, also maximised the characteristics of the plants by channelling magic power to amplify it. She used up many flowers in her experiment, but thanks to that, she was able to produce dry flowers in good condition, without much difficulty.

However, that was the first time Cordelia would be making dried mint. She was nervous, but the dried herbs were finished splendidly. With the combination of magic, she was able to make dry herbs with more vibrancy than when dried using normal conditions. If Cordelia wanted to make more dried flowers than that, then she thought that it would be necessary to find ways to improve it, other than the drying method. For example, searching for leaves during a period when they contain the most oil and harvest them. She had to give up on that this time around, but she wanted to investigate along that premise sometime.

(I always find things to study, no matter what I do.)

Cordelia put the dried mint into the kettle while thinking such things. At that moment, Ronnie finished his errand and returned.

“Welcome back. I’ve finished the preparations on my side too.”

“You’ve finished the preparations.....? Eh? You’re steaming this dried grass? What are you planning to make, Ojou-sama?”

“Essential oils. I’m planning on making an excellent balm.”

“You’re making balm? From this dried grass? You’re not making it by crushing nuts? Eh? So I analysed the grass because of that?”

Cordelia smiled wryly at Ronnie, who displayed an honest reaction.

“It’s alright. I should be able to do it, as long as this is the mint I know. Also, it should be able to raise the productivity way higher than that particular type of nut; moreover for a nut with bad efficiency.”

“..... I certainly thought that I was investigating whether it could be eaten or not. I didn’t think that I was analysing whether it could become medicine.”

“I’m sorry. But, you didn’t ask, did you?”

“That’s true, but.....”

However, Ronnie still had a face like he couldn’t understand.

“..... Well, it’s fine. It probably won’t explode.”

Ronnie gave a frank remark. Cordelia smiled wryly at him while heating up the apparatus. It was faster to get him to smell the fragrance rather than try to explain it to him.

After a while, the smell of mint wafted around them.

For Cordelia, the scent was a nostalgic one, but it was the first time Ronnie had smelt it. But it wasn’t like he didn’t react. From his reaction, she felt like he didn’t expect that such a strong fragrance would arise from dried grass.

Cordelia seemed like she was going to be a little prideful, but afterwards, something happened that surprised even Cordelia herself a little. The first thing she did was separate the water and essential oils while she was earnestly distilled, which took a long time in itself..... But the amount she’d extracted was more than she’d expected. Although the number of herbs she’d prepared hadn’t been that much, the essential oils that she could confirm, the actual amount, had accumulated to almost twice the amount she’d expected.

(..... Is this some kind of magic effect?)

The temperature should be moderate as well. In that case, I have no other reason to think otherwise. Could my intuition be off, since it’s been a while since I’ve tried this? Or is this a difference between this world and my previous one?

But that was good news, as well as being troublesome. If it were counterfeit, then it would become something else.

(I’m thankful that I could get this amount..... But the effects of the essential oil would be inestimable unless I request Ronnie to investigate it. If I don’t think carefully about adjusting the concentration, then it’s possible that the stimulus may be too strong.)

However, completing something that was different from what she'd predicted was by no means a bad thing. It was interesting for Cordelia to do experiments. Could she make something that attracted people more than nut balm? There was no choice for her but to make an attempt at that task.

"Is this supernatant what Ojou-sama wanted?"

"Yes. The supernatant is important, but the water is also valuable."

"Eh, well, anyway essential oil is..... Ojou-sama, you are going to mix this with a carrier oil to make the palm, aren't you?"

"Yes, but after the distillation is over. We have to find the proper concentration first."

"Indeed, this supernatant is too thick to use..... The antiseptic and anti-inflammatory effects can be seen, but if it's too thick, then it might be harmful to people. Well, to ascertain the level which could be said to be harmless is close to my main occupation so I can help."

Cordelia was amazed that Ronnie was able to find out a number of the properties by just glancing at it. Excellent.

"Thank you for your very reliable words."

"Not at all. I'm used to plants and poisons, but it's good to have a new experience in trying to make cosmetics."

The words that he'd said smoothly contained disturbing words that at least shouldn't be told to a young child. However, as a Parmeradia escort, it was a competent remark. Cordelia could do nothing but smile wryly.

Then she realised.

When Elvis isn't here, isn't it possible for Ronnie to be my escort when I go outside?

If that is granted, then it might be possible for me to collect more flowers.

While Cordelia was thinking such things, Ronnie stared at the essential oils.

"This is really amazing, Ojou-sama. But, why don't you channel magic power in while it's being distilled?"

"Eh?"

Cordelia didn't understand the meaning behind his words and tilted her head in curiosity.

He continued in a carefree manner.

"Even though Ojou-sama went through the trouble of increasing the dry mint's vitality and magic at the same time with your magic, a large portion of that was damaged by the heat. It feels as if a portion of the magic fell off when the mint was vaporised. It's thick enough, even with that, but if that didn't happen, then I think that the fragrance, magic and effect could remain after processing. Therefore, if you're going to make an excellent product, then you need to protect it with magic when you're heating it up."

Ronnie spoke with a severe look on his face and Cordelia was surprised again.

He had discovered the effects at a glance just a while ago, but he wasn't just watching during the experiment, he had analysed the movements of magic while looking nonchalant.

Cordelia received Ronnie's instructions; she once again prepared the mint and tried to channel magic into it as a new challenge, but that didn't go so well. She decided to channel magic through the glass, into the air-tight container that contained the herbs, but it wouldn't reach the herbs. It wasn't directed into the herbs.

Cordelia frowned, and Ronnie spoke as if talking to himself:

"Ojou-sama's magic..... Or rather, the compatibility of plant-related magic and the glass might be the worse. This might be tough."

The compatibility of the glass and plant related magic was the worse.

Cordelia never imagined that such a wall would hinder her. However, glass was favourable because impurities don't get mixed in during the process. It wasn't like she didn't have any other choices, but glass was the most suitable out of all the tools she saw in the laboratory in the magicians' wing. In the first place, even if it was said that the magic peeled off, it was only the increased portion of it; if some of it remained, then she should be able to make something that was at least close to the level as the ones she'd dealt with in her previous life. If that was the case, then it shouldn't be a bad product.

However, even though there was a possibility to make something better, it was regrettable that she had to readily give up because 'it was impossible'. It goes against Cordelia's principles to compromise, even though she was in a pleasant environment. It was still the first day. It was still too early to give up.

Cordelia once again held her hands towards the flask in silence. Then she drew a breath and once again turned her consciousness towards the magic inside of her own body..... She felt the magic that was released from her hands bounce back from the glass again.

Do I have to find another way? The moment Cordelia felt that:

"Ah. That's right, Ojou-sama. If it's a shop that specialises in selling experimental tools for magicians, then they might have glass that lets Ojou-sama's magic pass through."

Ronnie told that to Cordelia as if he'd just remembered.

"He's an artisan who makes experimental tools for magic, but he also makes tools that suit the magic of the person using them. Therefore, he might be able to make something that could alleviate the bad compatibility of the glass. He also deals with pots, kettles and flasks; so he might also have air-tight containers."

"..... Will it be expensive?"

"Well, for example, I would hesitate quite a lot to buy a flask on my salary."

Cordelia recalled the number of gold coins she had on hand. If it were enough, then she would like to buy it, even if it was somewhat unreasonable.

“If you look at it, could you determine whether I could use it?”

However, it wasn't worth considering if, by chance, it was something that she couldn't use. She wanted to treasure money, even if only slightly. She hesitated to rush into any purchase that had uncertainties.

Although, if she were to say that she 'wanted an experimental tool', then Elvis would surely buy it for her, but he had already invested a considerable amount on her.

Ronnie also put a hand to his chin at seeing Cordelia's severe expression and groaned.

“It's difficult, isn't it? I also want to go to that store and try it, but my magic and Ojou-sama's are different, so I can't test it. It's not like I can't come to a conclusion, but it won't be with certainty.”

“But if the thing I bought were of no use, then I'd be troubled. There is one thing I'd like to confirm, which is, would I be able to touch it if I went to the shop?”

Even though she had a chance, it was out of her reach.

Cordelia was vexed and immediately thought of trying to solve it by going there herself. If her magic was unique, then there was no other way to explain it.

“That is..... Wait, don't tell me you're planning to go, Ojou-sama? You're joking, aren't you?”

“We wouldn't know unless we see if my magic can pass through the product or not, isn't that right?”

“I, I don't think the Master will allow it.”

“I don't think it'll be dangerous if it's on the main street, do you? Or is the shop not located on the main street?”

“No, I don't think he'd allow it even if it's on the main street..... But it's on the west artisan street. I wouldn't go as far as to say that the public order is bad, but it's not a place where a noble would enter out on their own accord since it's bustling in its own way.”

It was outrageous, and Ronnie shook his head as if rejecting her proposal. Cordelia purposely sighed loudly.

“..... I understand. Well then, Ronnie...”

“Yes?”

Cordelia smiled widely and declared to Ronnie, who clearly looked relieved.

“Please choose clothes for a town girl of about my age..... Or an apprentice magician clothes for me to wear, by tomorrow afternoon.”

“What?!”

“I'll immediately go to collect the tool. I can count on you, can't I?”

“Nonono, that's impossible!!”

Ronnie, who had turned a ghastly pale, finally shouted.

However, Cordelia didn't change her mind, even though she thought he was a bit pitiful. That was why she continued with her unreasonable claim with an expression that was as if it was natural, and as if she was saying something that sounded obvious.

"If a noble went, they would stand out, wouldn't they? Since that's the case, I don't think there's any other way except for this."

"No, um, Ojou-sama, even if you have the clothes, what about Master's permission?"

"Father won't be coming back from the fief until the day after tomorrow. Did you forget your Master's schedule?"

"But."

"We only have tomorrow."

Cordelia stressed those words to Ronnie with a severe expression on her face.

Cordelia could do nothing if he were to say, "If I can't confirm the master's intentions, then I can't agree with you," right then. So she had to persuade him somehow.

"..... I understand. However, please bring along a minimum amount of escorts with you. If I could use magic as I please, then I could protect you as well, but I could end up killing my opponent if I lost control."

Ronnie raised both his hands in the air, as if he'd given up, and said a slightly disturbing remark. Cordelia softened her expression.

However, the words she uttered next contradicted her sympathy and contained the final blow.

"Thank you, but escorts are impossible. You'll have to protect me while holding back since Otou-sama might find out..... No, I hope that we won't get caught up in trouble in the first place."

She felt apologetic towards Ronnie, who was hanging his head, but she didn't feel like retracting her words at all.

"..... I'll be expecting a special reward for this."

Although his gaze was slightly mixed with resentment, this magician was also someone who worked for the Pameradia House. When life gave you lemons; make lemonade. He was an exceptional person that had such a disposition, after all.

Act 06: The Encounter of an Incognito Noble Girl

The following afternoon, Cordelia hung a 『In the middle of an experiment』 wooden tag on the entrance of the greenhouse and secretly went to the city together with Ronnie.

The outfit that Ronnie had prepared for Cordelia was a magician's robe, used by children, and she used the hood to completely cover her head. There weren't many town girls with platinum blonde hair, and them having red eyes was even rarer. That was why, if anybody saw this combination of hair and eyes, they would know that she was a noble. Ronnie was concerned about that and seemed to have chosen the robe to hide as many of Cordelia's features as possible. Cordelia would have preferred the town girl clothes better, but she had no choice but to accept the robes since he had such reasons. That was because her objective wasn't to cosplay as a town girl, but a glass that would let her magic through.

The place that Ronnie guided her to was at the corner of a street that was two streets away from the main road. The foot traffic was sparse, and would sometimes stop completely. But sometimes the sounds of various artisans at work could be heard from around the street.

“Every shop around this area make their goods on orders, so even the store owners don't go out in public much.”

“Is that right? It's fantastic that everyone has patronage, isn't it?”

“Oh, this way.”

Along the street, Ronnie stopped in front of a shop that looked just like a blacksmith. He pulled the door open and led Cordelia inside. It seemed that their destination was there.

She took a step inside, and the sight of many tools arranged in a disorderly fashion greeted her eyes.

The next thing she saw was —— a single man gulping down alcohol from a bottle at the counter.

“Welcome. The heck. Just when I thought it was a customer, it's just Ronnie, huh. A fellow who won't bring in money, I see.”

“That's cruel, Master!”

“I'd think about serving you if you were a cute nee-chan. Business is already over for today. I was feeling good after delivering supplies to the castle, and I just had to have a drink, you know. And it became like this.”

However, even while saying that, Master also said, “Well, I'm free anyway so I'll entertain you,” while grinning. He was clearly toying with Ronnie.

In contrast to Master, Ronnie looked like he was tired from the bottom of his heart and whispered an introduction to Cordelia, “Ojou-sama, this is the shop's Master.”

“What's this? Are you accompanying your kid today? When did you get married?”

“I didn't, and she's not my child! Furthermore, this child is 8, so if what Master is saying was true, then I would have had her when I was 11, you know! In the first place, today's customer is not me, but this child.”

“Hey, hey. I don’t have any children’s introductory magic sets here, you know?”

“That’s not needed. What we want today isn’t an introduction set, but an air-tight container made out of glass that can let this child’s magic penetrate through.”

Ronnie tried to cut him off and spoke disinterestedly as not to get carried away with the slightly drunk Master’s pace, but he also did it out of slight concern for Cordelia. He must have been worried because Master’s sharp tone was unfamiliar to a noble. But in the first place, if she cared about such things, then she wouldn’t have kept Ronnie by her side, and she wouldn’t ask him to bring her to this kind of place.

Cordelia thought, *he really fusses over the strangest things*, as if it was someone else’s problem while sending him a message with her eyes, *don’t mind it*. Ronnie saw that and sighed.

Master looked Cordelia with interest while saying, “That’s quite an extreme thing you want, huh.” Then, he took out a crystal ball from the cupboard behind him.

“Ojou-chan, try putting your magic into here in the same way you always use magic.”

“Like this?”

Cordelia held her hands out and inserted power into the crystal in the same way as when she used magic on flowers and the crystal changed colours. White swirls appeared in the previously clear jewel, and several lights of different shades burst from within.

“Ok, with this I know what your attributes are..... Hey there, this is unusual magic.”

“..... Can you do it?”

Ronnie asked the slightly surprised Master.

Master skulled the remainder of the bottle.

“Sorry, but I can’t give it to you straight away. It’s impossible with ready-made goods. I never thought that she would have such magic. Or rather, it didn’t occur to me because I’ve never seen it before. Light attribute and..... The heck is this. Dark attribute is mixed in as well? Earth and water are also included..... Whoa, that’s nasty magic. This kid, where’s she from?”

“Well, well, let’s leave that aside. Is it also difficult to make a custom one? Even for Master?”

“Ha? Stop bullshitting, just who do you think I am? I’ll make it. It’s easy for me to make a hole that allows any type of magic to pass through.”

Ronnie was pleased that his provocation had succeeded when he saw the Master put the bottle down onto the counter with a bang.

However, Cordelia, who was next to him, turned pale.

(Custom made?!)

It probably wouldn’t be so expensive that I can’t pay, but what should I do if my magic still can’t penetrate through a custom made glass? I couldn’t possibly buy a lot of glass. Would I still have to buy

it if I can't use it? I don't know what the price is, but I wonder if the money I saved up will all be gone from buying new experimental tools?

Ronnie whispered into Cordelia's ears as she was feeling anxious, "It's alright, Ojou-sama. Since it's Master's principle not to hand over something that the other party doesn't approve of. Instead, it's better that it's custom made.

"He's a pro, isn't he?"

"A good Master, is he not?"

"What're you whispering all secretly about, you guys!? Since that's the case, Ronnie, you're helping me out!"

Master pointed the empty bottle sternly at Ronnie, and he jumped.

"Me?! Why me!?"

"I'm going to make magic adjustments I've never done before. It needs creativity. In short, I'll be bored if I do it silently by myself. So, tag along as my conversation partner."

"Huh? Errr, isn't a pro's work normally one where they have to concentrate on making things?"

"You, do you think I'm normal? You're so naïve, even though you're a magician, aren't you?"

He retreated to the back of the shop as soon as he'd said that.

"..... Ah, Master! Can I bring this child with me?"

"Well, even if I say it's not interesting..... It might be interesting for a magician kid. I don't mind."

Cordelia was guided..... Or rather was left behind, so she followed Ronnie to the back of the shop.

It seemed like the shop had depth; there was a warehouse in the middle and at the back of that was the workshop.

Inside was a single female artisan. She tilted her head in confusion as soon as she saw Master.

"Huh? Weren't we done for the day?"

"My bad, but we've got visitors. What were you planning on doing?"

"I was thinking of making the test tubes for stock right now..... But should I clean up?"

"Nah, that's convenient. I'm gonna need glass, so hand me the place. You can leave the test tubes for tomorrow. You're also done for the day."

"Eh? Ok, I don't mind. Well then, I'll be excusing myself."

After that, Master occupied the place where she was and started working.

First, he plunged a ladle-like thing into an iron pot that was flaming on the inside; like the ones old witches in fairy-tales used. Then, in the next instant, just when she thought that he'd pull it out, he poured molten glass onto the stand.

“You guys, have a good look at the work of the great me!”

Master said that and held his hands on top of the molten glass. Then, the shape of the glass began to change as if it was alive. When she’d realised it, it had already formed into the shape of a great cube.

“Wow.....”

Amazing, she tried to continue, but Master had interrupted her.

“This is bad..... Sorry, but could you get up from your seat, Ojou-san?”

“Huh?”

“My magic is being pulled towards yours, Ojou-san. So it’s not being transmitted to the glass very well. Ojou-san’s magic is too powerful.”

Master was serious unlike before and showed a solemn face. However, Ronnie, who saw that, said in interest.

“Even though you were the one who told us to have a good look? My magic isn’t being pulled by this child, you know?”

“Are you being sarcastic? You don’t have to manipulate magic so you wouldn’t know!”

“..... Well then, I’ll be at the shop.”

Cordelia thought that it was better not to think about whether Ronnie and Master got along well or not, and turned towards the shop. She wanted to see him work, but if she got in the way, then that was inevitable.

“Ah, I strictly advise you not to leave the shop. You absolutely can’t.”

“Yes, I know.”

Cordelia answered the voice coming from behind her, rudely and without stopping, and closed the door.

She left the warehouse, and the shop’s bell rang with a jingle just as she’d appeared in the shop.

Is it a customer? Would it be better for me to call Master? She thought, but she immediately dismissed the thought.

“Sorry for intrud-ing! H-huh? If it isn’t Dilly.”

“..... Eh?”

“Hey. What’re you doing?”

The one who appeared was Vernoux.

He didn’t have blonde hair and blue eyes like when she last saw him, but brown hair and dark brown eyes, but his face was definitely Vernoux himself. In the first place, there shouldn’t be anyone other than Vernoux who would call her ‘Dilly’ after seeing her deeply hidden in a hood. The difference in his hair and eye colour was likely the work of the Flantheim’s magic or something else. Even though the

quality of magic wrapped around him was the same, she felt as if the wavelength was a bit different from usual.

“How do you do, Vernoux-sama. What are you doing in this sort of place?”

“I’m looking around incognito. It’s been a while since I’ve had a society observation trip..... Rather, aren’t you surprised? My hair and eyes are a very different colour, aren’t they?”

“I am surprised. You seem very used to this.”

Vernoux broadly grinned after looking around the shop to confirm that Master wasn’t around.

“It’s an important experience, isn’t it? Getting to know the world that you can’t see by staying locked up in the mansion, that is. I always have trouble ditching my escorts.”

“It is truly a fine thing to have fun, and I think that your words are quite right, but please exercise some caution. It is extremely dangerous for a precious heir to go out alone.”

Cordelia shrugged her shoulders at Vernoux who apparently seemed more mischievous than she’d expected.

She, herself, had asked the impossible out of Ronnie, and thus had no right to say it, but she thought that his escorts sure had it tough.

However, it seemed that Vernoux had plenty of complaints with those words alone.

“I thought you were like a man, but you’re also like a mother, aren’t you? Nitpicky. Also, I’m not alone. I have Gille with me.”

“Your companion?”

Vernoux called out to a boy who was looking at the items, “Hey!” He had dark brown hair and eyes like the current Vernoux. However, the wavelength of his magic was somewhat close to Vernoux’s..... No, the wavelength was the same, so she predicted that he had probably got Vernoux to cast magic on him.

“This guy’s my companion. Uuh..... His name’s Gille.”

“..... I don’t think that the name of your companion is something you could forget.”

“That’s not it. It’s just that we have various circumstances too.”

Vernoux said that as he briefly introduced her to the boy, “Gille, this is Dilly.” *I see, him introducing me by my pet name probably means that that isn’t the other person’s real name either.*

“It’s nice to meet you.”

“..... Nice to meet you.”

The boy called Gille spoke in a choked voice after hearing Cordelia’s words.

Is he a little shy? But at this rate, an awkward silence will be created. Vernoux helped her out while Cordelia was wondering whether she should continue talking or not.

“What did you come here for, Dilly?”

“Eh? Ah, I thought I’d like some glassware, so I came here to place an order for them.”

“Hmmm. You’re really a strange one after all.”

Unlike Gille who didn’t say anything, Vernoux spoke to Cordelia without restraint, but Gille advised him, “That’s rude!”

A gentlemen.....!

She noticed that they were talking on equal terms. While being moved by the difference between Gille and Vernoux. They probably got along really well since they were both sneaking around together and his social status was probably high as well.

“What kind of tools are the two of you.....”

Looking for?

The words that Cordelia wanted to say were interrupted by screams coming from outside of the shop.

“..... A child’s scream?”

It seemed that Cordelia hadn’t imagined the voice, and Vernoux quickly shifted his body close to the door. Then, he opened the door just a little and peeked at the situation outside. Thereupon, they could clearly hear the previous indistinct voice.

“Please stop it. Return those flowers to me!”

“I’m saying that this is my turf, Ojou-chan. Come on.”

A child’s voice and an adult’s voice.

“That’s.....”

“..... New ones drifted here again, huh.”

“Do you know something?”

Cordelia asked Vernoux who had the door slightly opened, without revealing his body to the outside.

Vernoux distanced himself from the door, faced Cordelia and answered.

“Yeah. Various kinds of people gather in the Royal Capital. Once in a while, there are guys like that who get the wrong idea and cause a disturbance. Fools who try to show off their power to kids who sell flowers.”

“..... My companion is in the back. I’ll go and bring help.”

“No, that won’t be necessary. Since I’ll be restraining them with my magic ———. Aaa-aargh?! ”

Vernoux seemed to have noticed something and suddenly let out a voice in surprise. Cordelia was surprised at his voice and saw that something was out of place.

“..... Come to think of it, where is Gille-sama?”

“Won’t you stop?”

The moment Cordelia heard that voice, she stuck to the door alongside Vernoux and looked outside.

Then she saw Gille, who was supposed to be with them, standing majestically in front of the hoodlum who looked like a bandit. Next to him was the flower girl who appeared to be around their age.

“Wait, Vernoux-sama.....!”

“That guy..... Going out of as he pleases! What’s he planning on doing? Like this, even Gille would be caught up in my magic.”

Vernoux muttered while making a sour face. It seemed that Gille’s actions were a hindrance to the magic Vernoux was planning to cast.

“That person is a noble-sama who isn’t used to travelling incognito, isn’t he?”

“Yeah. Today’s the first time he’s done it..... By the way, you can use magic, can’t you?”

“Huh? Yes.”

“Then use the same skill as your older brother and restrain him.”

“..... But, I have never seen Onii-sama’s magic before.”

“Make plants grow rapidly and entangle the opponents..... The flowers in that girl’s basket, you see them too, don’t you? If you can restrain him with that, then I’ll handle the rest somehow.”

If she were to say whether she could imagine her older brother’s magic from hearing that rough explanation, then she would say that she couldn’t at all.

Make flowers grow rapidly? I can’t see far enough to see what kind of flowers they are, but I think that the flowers in the basket should be small bouquets. In other words, I couldn’t make them grow enough to entangle someone even if I stretched them.

(If that’s the case, rather than making them grow, I should forcibly draw out the powers of the plants..... Amplification, so to speak? Is it close to the magic preservation skill that I used together with drying when I made dried herbs? Do I use it along with growth.....? But growth is the exact opposite of that skill..... Argh, whatever, I don’t know!)

However, things seemed tense outside. The hoodlum swung his fist down, and Gille nimbly dodged, but Gille was unarmed. If things went on like this, then Gille would be at a disadvantage.

In that case, she could only give one reply.

“I, I understand!”

She couldn’t say that she didn’t understand.

It was the first time she’d use remote control-like magic. Moreover, it was growth magic which had a high level of difficulty.

Cordelia imagined how her brother would use that kind of magic skill as she channelled power into both her hands and stocked all of her magic. While doing so, she quietly peeked at the hoodlum through the door crack.

(It's no good. My magic won't reach him through this small crack. I have to go outside. But how do I launch the magic in my hands.....?)

Distractions were a powerful enemy when one manipulated magic. However, even if she understood that it wasn't something she could do without thinking. Even she, herself, knew that her magic was shaking horribly.

But, perhaps because of the after-effects, a scenery different from the usual was reflected in Cordelia's eyes. Her field of vision looked as if it was suddenly covered with red stained glass and the glass was broken in some places. It was as if an opening had formed and the moment she saw that space, she understood.

(A hole that allows magic to pass through, that's what Master said!)

If the hint is a hole in the glass that allows magic to cross over, then the gap that exists in mid-air, in the broken glass-like thing, might as well be a road that enabled magic to pass through. And, that just might have been the hint to remote control. She wasn't confident, but she couldn't afford to hesitate.

Cordelia opened the door with her shoulder and poured magic into the opening, if she were to compare, then it was like putting a thread through a needle eye.

The hoodlum was startled by the loud sound of a bell and Gille turned around almost at the same time. The magic that Cordelia had released reached the inside of the girl's flower basket.

The flowers rapidly grew and, in the blink of an eye, intertwined around both of the hoodlum's feet. At the same time, the stained glass world vanished from Cordelia's field of vision.

"I did it!"

"Okay, that'll do!"

Vernoux, who was still inside of the shop, muttered something as soon as Cordelia cried out and then held his hands out towards the hoodlum.

In the next moment, an intense light leapt at the hoodlum, and he collapsed.

(Just like a stun gun..... I guess. He asked me to restrain the hoodlum so that Gille-sama and the girl wouldn't get hit by that, didn't he?)

But, that hoodlum isn't dead now, is he? Cordelia thought, but she didn't dare to approach him.

Also, even if it had already come to that, she was told to stay inside the shop so it wouldn't do to continue being outside. Therefore, she rushed back into the shop.

In exchange, Vernoux took a step outside and blew a whistle with his fingers. Out of nowhere, two people with little presence appeared; they collected the hoodlum and left. It seemed that even though Vernoux said that he'd ditched his guards, they probably caught up to him, and it appeared that

Vernoux, himself, understood that very well. *That's why he didn't panic until Gille jumped outside*, Cordelia thought.

In that sort of situation, Gille talked to the girl outside.

“Are you alright?”

“Huh, yes..... Thanks.”

“You should be careful.”

Gille spoke eloquently, and the girl seemed to be mesmerised by him. In contrast to that shoujo manga like scene, Vernoux's face was extremely close to a Hannya.

He's angry. Extremely angry.

After Vernoux grabbed Gille, who had returned to the front of the shop, by the scruff of his neck, back inside, Cordelia could predict that he would yell at Gille.

She took a step back and gently pressed on her ears. In the first place, Vernoux's voice wasn't something so soft that she wouldn't be able to hear, just by covering her ears.

“It's not 『You should be careful』, idiot!”

“Ouch!”

“It's good that it settle with only a little pain. You rushed out there without a plan; if things went badly, then you could have been seriously injured.”

Of course, such a thing didn't happen ——, no, more like, Vernoux's escorts wouldn't have let it happened, but that wasn't the issue.

However, Gille seemed unsatisfied by Cordelia's words and countered with a half-glare towards Cordelia and Vernoux.

“But, I couldn't just leave it be, now could I?”

“No one said such a thing, did they?!”

“That's right, I also didn't say that we should leave it be. I just wanted to express that it was necessary to consider the situation. Jumping out there is a courageous move, but it's not like it couldn't be called reckless either. Courage and recklessness are two different things.”

Cordelia rebuked in one breathe.

There was no need to jump in without a plan. Instead, if he had taken civil action, then Gille, himself, wouldn't have been exposed to danger.

It seemed that Gille had thought about it in some way, but he didn't feel like accepting it obediently.

He whispered.

“..... I haven't done anything wrong.”

Cordelia heard those words and delivered the finishing blow.

“Yes, you haven’t done anything wrong; but you also didn’t do the best thing.”

“Di-Dilly, I think that’s enough.....”

“Vernoux-sama, please remain silent. Gille-sama, people would get sad if you got hurt.”

Cordelia ignored Vernoux, who was defending Gille, even though he should have been angry at him while staring at Gille and said.



After that, Gille was lost for an answer, he looked as if he wanted to say something, but in the end, he said nothing.

It wasn't like he was at an age where she could forcibly make him answer. She could also imagine that, since he was at that age, he wouldn't obediently admit to something even if he understood it.

(..... Well, I wonder how I should follow this up.)

She wouldn't be able to convince him just by scolding him. She thought it was important to relay the reason, but unfortunately, she couldn't think of a way to follow her words up. Just as Gille insisted that he'd done nothing wrong, she also didn't intend to say anything wrong.

Amid such an awkward silence, a surprisingly reluctant voice broke that equilibrium.

"..... Say, I felt the presence of intense magic being discharged a while ago?"

"Eh? Ah, yes. There aren't any big problems, Ronnie."

The one who opened the door to the inner part of the shop, and languidly spoke to Cordelia, was Ronnie.

Ronnie looked a little surprised to see two other children there besides Cordelia, but he didn't show any more significant reaction than that. However, it didn't seem like he believed Cordelia's words.

"Well then, please come with me to the back. Honestly, I feel uneasy about whatever happened."

Ronnie's reproachful gaze of, "I told you not to leave the shop didn't I?" was too painful.

"See you later. I'll be excusing myself."

Cordelia moved to the back workshop while desperately pretending that nothing had happened.

She thought that Ronnie had been helpful since they were caught in an awkward atmosphere.

However, Cordelia's magic obstructed Master's smelting and, in the end, he couldn't finish the glass that day.

◆◆◆◆◆

As a result, the finished product would be delivered to her at a later date. As Cordelia's magic composition was projected in the crystal ball, it seemed that she didn't need to visit the shop often.

Master assertively said to Cordelia, "I'll be counting on you for verification when it reaches the final check-up stage, but until then I have no use for you."

Cordelia was depressed that she'd lost her reason to go to the city, but Ronnie didn't hide his relieved look.

His reaction might have been understandable since he was in a situation where he had to keep it a secret from the Earl.

(I wanted to know more about the city, so this might be a little disappointing..... But, my project is definitely progressing.)

Cordelia returned to her own room at the mansion and pulled out a book from among the books which lined up on top of her desk.

It was an experiment record and diary; it was where Cordelia wrote her experiment plans, the medicinal herb types and effects she remembered, and information about the medicinal herbs that she'd collected.

“Today passed by like a storm, didn't it?”

Cordelia muttered while writing in her diary.

She wanted to write about it before she forgot the feeling she had when she successfully cast remote magic. She ran her pen through the page based on that desire. She continued to write the feeling she had at that time; perhaps no one other than her could read what she wrote.

She tried to ask Ronnie about remote magic on their way back from the workshop.

He seemed surprised that she knew about remote magic and explained it briefly to her.

“Well, simply put, you increase the magic within yourself and find a path within the atmosphere. Magic is not normally visible, but if someone with high mana concentrated, then it's possible for them to perceive it. Therefore, concentrate and choose a path where your magic won't be repelled by the magic in the atmosphere and fire it..... It's like a feeling of detachment. Afterwards, the magic will just fly off on its own.”

“..... Does that path look concrete?”

“I think it's different depending on the person's magic, but in my case, I could see a lot of colourful small spheres in the atmosphere. Because the colour indicates attribute, it's like you're finding a path that doesn't repel the magic you're using. The power falls when you hit your magic with a strange attribute and the direction of the magic will also twist.”

“.....”

Cordelia didn't know if Ronnie's explanation was complicated or if she had a hard time following what he'd said, but at least she didn't remember doing such a profuse thing. However, the fact that she was able to successfully use the skill meant that what she saw was probably that 『path』.

“Well, if the magic one manipulates is different, then the path is different. So it's impossible to express it in a single word.”

Ronnie concluded, but for the time being, she was glad that she couldn't see what Ronnie did. *I would have definitely been confused if I saw a lot of colourful spheres at that time*, she thought. If she could see the road clearly, then there was nothing better than that.

The red world which was the same colour as her eyes. *Is this the Pameradia House's influence* ———, she'd also thought, but that was immediately countered by Ronnie's words.

“Which reminds me, it feels like the Master pushes his power through if there are some obstacles in the way. It seems that you can wrench open the atmosphere’s magic if a path doesn’t exist. It might be because he has excess magic, nevertheless, is that the norm of the Pameradia House?”

“..... This is the first time I’ve ever heard of it, ask my Onii-sama about those things.”

She recalled it when she’d stopped reminiscing.

“..... At that time, I wonder if it would have been better if I’d said a single, 『You were cool』 to Gille-sama.”

She didn’t intend to compliment him.

She thought that the actions taken by Gille weren’t praiseworthy. However, his dashing appearance which was just like a Prince from a fairy-tale was cool, even if he was young.

If she’d been in the flower girl’s shoes..... then Gille would have definitely looked like a little hero. However, it was a bit late to think about it at that point, and it was difficult to tell him that since some time had already passed; let alone after she’d said words that sounded as if she was lecturing him.

(Maybe I was too harsh on him. I might have been immature. I’ll reflect on it.)

Even though I should’ve known that a sound argument wasn’t always the right one.

Cordelia thought that and closed her diary.

Then she made one resolution.

If I meet him again, then I’ll find his good points and compliment on how amazing they are.

When she made that resolution towards someone whose real name she didn’t know; she had a strange feeling that she’d meet him again.

“..... Gille-sama was a gentleman. That’s why I’m sure he’ll become an even more amazing gentleman next time we meet.”

The little gentleman will definitely grow up into a really cool adult, she thought, unable to suppress her laughter.

(I also have to become a proper lady for when that time comes.)

If they were to meet again, then she had to become someone that wouldn’t lose to the imaginary him.

A small resolution was quietly lit within Cordelia.

Act 07: A Light Crimson Petal and a Letter

“The prototype glass container was completed,” ——— Cordelia received that message from Ronnie five days after she’d gone out to the city.

That was the first thing that Ronnie reported to Cordelia when he’d appeared in front of her, and then he made a suggestion.

“So, I’d like to invite Master to the mansion soon; would that be alright?”

“Can’t I go to the city?”

“You can’t. The master will kill me, so please give me a break. If it is not fine to invite him here, then please consider that you wouldn’t be able to receive the glass.”

Recently, after her morning lecturers were over, Cordelia received basic training in analysis magic from Ronnie; not in the greenhouse..... but rather, in the new laboratory she’d received from Elvis.

The new laboratory she’d received was originally one of the detached buildings, with a structure consisting of two floors and a basement.

It must have been renovated since all the floors now only had one room. It was a useful laboratory, equipped with chairs and desks; there was even a washroom on the first floor.

Cordelia used the whole first floor for experiments and a portion of the second floor was made into a storage room. She hadn’t used the basement yet, but she planned on making it into a storage warehouse.

(But Otou-sama, just when did you prepare all this? Your daughter is impressed.)

This gift, just like the greenhouse, which was arranged unnoticed, even though she was always at home, astonished her.

But she couldn’t stay surprised. Her sense of purpose swelled up inside of her when she received this, “With this, I can quickly make the poultice for Otou-sama!” She felt delighted at the excellent news that Ronnie had brought to her; after all, if there were no tools, then she wouldn’t be able to make any progress.

However, she felt a little disappointed that Master was going to deliver the glass. She wanted to use going to get the tools as a chance to go into the city so that she could see the townscape that she couldn’t take her time seeing last time.

On her previous trip, she had a moment’s free time before going into the workshop and inside of the workshop, but it wasn’t enough for her to walk around the city. The merchants, who visited the mansion told her about popular goods, but there were many things she couldn’t understand unless she saw them with her own eyes..... was her cover story, but most of it was just because she was purely interested in the goods.

But it was difficult for her to do so when she saw how hard Ronnie was shaking his head, and how pale he got from her words. So, Cordelia stopped asking for the impossible.

It wasn't fun, but it wasn't like she couldn't understand the reason why Ronnie refused.

A lady's incognito escorts had to make sure that nothing happened 『by chance』 and on top of that, Elvis was home, unlike last time. To prevent Elvis from noticing, she also couldn't meet any of the other servants in the city by chance. In short, the risk of him finding out that she snuck out was very high. It wasn't unreasonable for Ronnie to be so unwilling.

To begin with, she felt like Ronnie looked at her as if she was a troublemaker. 'She definitely won't behave herself, now will she?' he looked at her like that.

She wouldn't say anything selfish that would be dislikeable.

Yes, that was why she maintained self-control for that matter.

Being able to read between the lines and understand TPO [1] was also an indispensable skill for a lady. That was why, no matter how many times Ronnie rudely said, "Ojou-sama is unexpectedly untalented with analysis magic, aren't you?" as if he was impressed, Cordelia eluded it with a wry smile. 'There's no need to say it like that; you could have said it a bit more indirectly' She definitely wouldn't say something like that. He was the teacher who Cordelia had requested, and she believed that what he said was probably correct. Cordelia couldn't really understand the magic that Ronnie talked about.

When Cordelia used magic, she mostly perceived and imagined the 『colour of magic power』. To make it into a pretty colour with an atmosphere, as if her senses were mixed with the colours; that was also what her tutor taught her.

But the analysis magic that Ronnie was teaching her was logical. It seemed that the magic power that Cordelia perceived as colours each had their own name, similar to chemical elements, and the combinations were used in the same way as chemical formulas.

As Cordelia was also a person of science, in her previous life, it wasn't like she was bad with chemical formulas. However, she couldn't adapt to the sudden change in how she used magic. However, magic components were often separated during analysis and, in Cordelia's case, the results were disastrous if it was done in Cordelia's magic since that relied on her intuition. Even if she understood that they were connected together like chemical formulas, she still couldn't section and analyse them with magic. Still, she tried to practise it several times. *Just how many times did I cut leaves perfectly into two equal parts with analysis magic, aiming for only the magic power?*

However, even if she couldn't analysis anything, as Ronnie said before, there wouldn't be any problems if she just left it to the magicians who were employed by the Pameradia House, so she didn't have anything to worry about.

But, she also had the disposition of wanting to be able to do something, unless she knew that she wasn't able. There was no need for weaknesses, as a beautiful lady. Regardless of whether she could do technical things or not, she wanted to at least be able to do the basics. So even if she couldn't do it now, she wanted to reach a point where she could do it in the future; —— Cordelia smiled at Ronnie while that little passion burnt within her.

Just you wait, I'll be able to perform a magnificent analysis someday.

“Say Ojou-sama, your smile is giving me the chills; it’s exactly the same as when the master gets angry…….”

“I’m sure it’s just your imagination. More importantly, you’re calling Master here, aren’t you? The sooner you call him, the better. If he can come today, then I want him to come today. If he can’t come, then make it on an afternoon that’s convenient for Master.”

“I understand. Well then, I’ll send a message out, but he’ll most likely come straight away if you tell him to. He said he wanted to enter an Earl House’s grounds, after all.”

“Sorry if he comes smelling like alcohol,” Ronnie added mischievously.

A reserved knock was heard at the door while she was talking to Ronnie.

“Emina? Come in.”

“Excuse me, Cordelia-sama.”

Emina informed Cordelia with a light, but elegant bow, “Vernoux-sama is here.”

“Looks like you’re having a lot of fun, Dilly.”

At the same time, Vernoux’s face peeped out from behind Emina.

“Oh my, Vernoux-sama? It’s been a long time, hasn’t it?”

Even if she’d said it had been a long time, it’d only been around five days. However, he would come over unannounced once every three days ever since they’d met, so she thought that the interval between his visits had been longer this time.

Furthermore, he came alone. Only he came here and he seemed quite accustomed to going incognito…… *Is that fine, Marquis House?*

“I really wanted to come a bit earlier; I had to express and write reflections down quite a lot of times.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Did you reflect properly?”

“Next time, I’ll sneak out without causing trouble.”

Vernoux said while shrugging; he hadn’t reflected at all.

Cordelia thought that the child’s potential was frightening because that was a genuine eight-year-old. He would probably become a cunning person who could put adults to shame with his scheming. She noted to herself that she should be careful not to dance on the palm of his hand.

“Ojou-sama, I’ll excuse myself.”

Ronnie spoke while Cordelia was being appealed to by Vernoux. He bowed and left the room.

It seemed that only withdrawing when there were visitors, was perfectly present within Ronnie’s head.

Cordelia said, “Yes, please rest in your room.” —— In short, ‘We will be continuing after Vernoux-sama leaves.’

It seemed that it was more or less conveyed to Ronnie, and he smiled wryly as he left that place. He was probably going to take the time to talk with Master.

“Emina, the sweets..... and the new tea that’s arrived. Please bring those out.”

“As you wish, Ojou-sama.”

“Well then Vernoux-sama, the chair might be a little uncomfortable, but please have a seat.”

Cordelia suggested that Vernoux sit on the chair. The wooden chair that Cordelia liked had been made sophisticatedly, but it wasn’t like it was upholstered with velvet, so it was hard. It was not the type of chair that nobles usually used.

However, as could be said of the heir of a Marquis, he sat down elegantly without complaining.

“Is this hue from the Juglis tree? This is the first time I’ve seen a chair like this, but it feels good to the touch. It’s a speciality of the Pameradia fief, isn’t it?” He declared.

It looked like he knew a good product, even though he was a child. Moreover, he seemed to hold considerable knowledge, since he understood the specialities of other fiefs and could even guess them correctly just by seeing them.

Cordelia thought that the saying, ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover,’ probably referred to that. No, in Vernoux’s case it is more his actions than appearance, but it probably meant something like that.

“『The new tea leaves』, was it? To have them directly delivered to Ojou-sama’s mansion means..... That you negotiated with the merchants yourself?”

“Yes. I can guarantee the taste.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“So..... What kind of business did you come for today?”

Vernoux always came over for confectionary and to kill time. Cordelia thought that today would be the same as well, and requested for the tea and confectionaries, but she asked just to make sure.

However, Vernoux had a different purpose than usual for coming.

“I came to deliver something today. If possible, I want to take the reply back with me, so I’d like you to write one. Of course, I’ll be having the tea and sweets.”

“Delivery? A reply..... is it?”

Cordelia tilted her head in confusion, and Vernoux handed her a white envelope.

It was a simple envelope with neither the addressee’s name nor the sender’s signature.

“This is?”

“It’s from Gille addressed to Dilly. If possible, please read it now.”

Vernoux said that and Cordelia thought about searching for a letter opener, but then she suddenly thought of another method she wanted to try; she aimed for the tip of the envelope and cast analysis magic.

Thereupon, the upper part of the letter was cut by her surplus magic, just like the time with the leaves, and the envelope was opened beautifully.

It was used for something other than its original purpose, but this might also be useful.

“That’s quite an interesting way to use magic. Is it elementary disassembling magic?”

“It’s a secret.”

Cordelia lied; she didn’t want to say that it was a failure. Then she took out the writing paper that was inside.

The writing paper, unlike the white envelope on the outside, was slightly light pink in colour. The next thing she looked at wasn’t the writing on the paper, but the petals that were embedded in the lower right corner.

They were from a rose.

The petals looked as if they were see-through on the thin, yet high-quality, paper. Cordelia couldn’t imagine what kind of processing the paper went through for it to become like that. Without thinking about it too deeply, her voice unintentionally spilt, “Pretty.”

“Well, I don’t mind that you’re fascinated with the writing paper, but read the contents as well.”

“..... You’re being a little impatient, Vernoux-sama.”

Just when people are finally feeling impressed, Cordelia thought and turned her attention to the writing.

The handwriting in the letter was as neat as a copybook, and it didn’t look like the handwriting of a child at all. However, she could tell that he had written it in a bit of a hurry. That was also evident in the content of the letter.

『First of all, please excuse me for writing in a way that deviates away from formality. I had just heard that Vernoux will be visiting you, Dilly-sama; so I immediately rushed to pick up my pen.』

Cordelia smiled a little wryly at how the letter started.

Vernoux always visited unannounced.

This time, too, he had probably made up his mind and was in the mood to visit. She had no doubt that Gille had probably rushed to finish the letter so that he could entrust it to Vernoux.

With that in mind, she continued to read on.

『Thank you very much for the other day. When I recall it now, it was an impulsive and embarrassing action, and I’m reflecting upon what actions I, who was ignorant about the city, should have taken.

I had intended to keep myself composed up until now. However, I would like to dedicate myself to being able to make sound judgements, just like you and Vernoux.

I can't do enough to thank you, but I enclosed a bookmark with this letter. It was the first time I've made something like this under the guidance of my mother.

Since I heard that you like flowers, I pray that it is to your liking.♪

“.....”

The letter was well-written considering his haste. Cordelia looked inside the envelope once more and saw a beautiful pressed pink rose bookmark, even though there were only a few petals on there.

“It's beautiful.”

Cordelia spoke in a small voice once more, and Vernoux laughed.

“Gille, that guy, he was really worried about it. He actually said he wanted to write a more proper letter. Well, I didn't tell you that, though.”

“I don't dislike letters such as this, you know?”

She actually liked them more than letters that dragged on, but as expected, she didn't go as far as to say that out loud.

“If you don't mind, please write him a reply. If you do so, then I think it'll give him some peace of mind. He was really nervous before.”

“Let's leave aside the matter of him being nervous..... I understand.”

“Dilly, you're really strange, aren't you? This kind of writing style, I probably can't write it even if I tried. Can you do it?”

“I plan to live according to the circumstances, you see.”

Cordelia asked Emina to bring her some stationery.

The stationery Cordelia had wasn't as unusual as Gille's, but she had several in pale colours. Cordelia chose a sky blue one from amongst the collection she had. It had a slight cloud watermark, but it was a favourite of hers.

It was the same colour as the sky on the day she went to the city. She chose a dark blue for the colour of the ink.

(..... I'm not really good at writing, so I'm a bit nervous.)

She had put in great effort to write beautifully, but she was also bad at writing in her previous life. However, writing would become necessary for her future. It wouldn't do for her to not be able to write them.

It seemed that even Vernoux took her privacy into consideration and didn't look like he would peek at what she was writing.

Cordelia confirmed that and puffed out a breath, then began to write vigorously with her pen.

First of all..... Who was the one who ought to reflect?

『Gille-sama, I have been told to quickly write my reply, so I'll be leaving out formalities as well. Thank you very much for the wonderful bookmark. I will use it with care.

If you ask me to be brazen, then excessive reflection isn't good either. In the first place, even though I had given you candid advice at that time, it wasn't like everything that Vernoux-sama and I said was correct. Rather, I believe I've said too much. I don't have courage like you do. That's why going out in front of a girl and protecting her like you did is something I cannot do.

And I'm sure that the girl you saved viewed you as very cool, just like a prince from fairy-tale.

If I had been in her shoes, then I believe I would have felt that way.

Please let me imagine that if your current bravery had been mixed in with calm judgement, then you would undoubtedly grow into an even more amazing man.』

Cordelia continued writing..... But as soon as she got this far, she stopped and thought that it was a little bit exaggerated. *I'll rewrite it, after all*, she thought that and folded the letter she'd composed so far. She put that aside, picked up a new piece of paper and she tried to ink the fresh piece of paper; —— but she suddenly saw a hand reaching out to her from the edge of her eyes and stopped it with her left hand.

“Vernoux-sama, please release your hand.”

“It's not like it's..... full of mistakes, now is it?”

Cordelia appealed to Vernoux, with what was probably the best smile she could make, but Vernoux also responded with the most dazzling smile he had.

“Because it is full of mistakes, I'll be troubled if you were to deliver this.”

“No, no. It's precisely because it's the first letter you'd written that it holds your true feelings and thus has meaning..... Or so father said.”

“Vernoux-sama, isn't it you who doesn't listen to the Marquis' stories?”

If others saw them, then they both had wonderful smiles on their faces, but it was transparent to them that they looked like a fox and tanuki. Originally, Vernoux wasn't Cordelia's natural enemy, but she also thought that he was enough of an enemy in parts that didn't involve her life.

(In the first place, Vernoux-sama's cognitive abilities aren't those of an 8-year-old child. Is this what they call a child prodigy?)

Their hands trembled as both of them refused to take a step back. The difference in power would probably be evident if that had already been 10 years in the future, but as of now, they had no differences in their physique.

However..... There was a difference in physical strength.

As she'd thought, there was a difference in strength between Vernoux, who was a boy, and Cordelia, who was an Ojou-sama.

“Hey, Vernoux-sama!!”

“I won’t look at the contents. I don’t plan on being that tactless.”

“You’re tactless enough!”

Cordelia looked at Vernoux, who had already put the letter into his breast pocket, and sighed.

She probably wouldn’t be able to take it back from the place he’d put it in, and she didn’t want to show the appearance of a flustered Ojou-sama.

Cordelia cleared her throat. First of all, she had to get the letter back.

“Vernoux, at least put it in his envelope.”

“Envelope? Oh, sure.”

“Aah, but before that..... I forgot to write something, so please give me back the letter once more. I’ll write it down.”

“If it’s necessary then add it onto another sheet of paper.”

“..... It’s fine after all.”

Unfortunately, her efforts to recover her letter was easily rejected.

As expected, this guy, he’s sharp.

And he has a bad disposition.

Cordelia gave up and handed Vernoux an envelope that was the same colour as the writing paper. *Either way, I was in the middle of writing a paragraph, but let’s blame that on Vernoux-sama too.*

Just as she’d thought that Emina appeared from out of nowhere and called out to them.

“Today is chocolate cake.”

A neatly cut up chocolate cake was arranged on a simple plate. The top of the cake was decorated with a small amount of gold leaf and coupled with pure white whipped cream. Cordelia looked at the cake with sparkling eyes, as if it was the only thing in the room.

Vernoux also didn’t hide his excitement and said, “It looks delicious.”

“As always, I’m jealous of the sweets here. Sweet things rarely come out at my house.”

“Does Marquis-sama not like sweet things that much?”

“Mother doesn’t like them, not father. She doesn’t like them because it’ll make her get fat, she would sulk immediately as soon as father and I eat them.”

It appeared that even in this world, diet is an eternal theme for ladies.

Well, it wasn’t that surprising since corsets exist in this world. But, I don’t think that you’d be able to eat to the point where you get fat while wearing a corset... Temptations might be bigger than the pressure of the corset.

However, if that was the case, then a day might come when detoxification herbs will be useful as well..... Cordelia made a note of it in her mind.

“Oh, that’s right!”

“Is something the matter?”

“Dilly, you said the Earl was your type, but are knights also your type?”

What was this all of a sudden?

Cordelia was suspicious, but it was probably a pure question asked by a child. He might have asked it because he wanted to learn the coolness of adult men. In that case, answering with her preferences alone would probably be slightly off from what he expected. Cordelia thought and intended to tell him about a typical lady’s preferences.

“Let’s see..... Say, Emina. I generally think that knights are liked by ladies. What do you think?”

Emina was a little surprised that she’d been dragged into the conversation, but she didn’t make it evident that she was shaken. She just slightly widened her eyes and then slowly answered Cordelia.

“Let me see. I think a lot of knights are idolised by ladies because of their powerful aura, martial prowess and courteous manners.”

“I also agree with Emina..... That’s how it is, Vernoux-sama. Even adult woman like Emina admire men who are knights.”

“..... No, I didn’t want to hear the general opinion.”

Vernoux had heard the two talk and said that, but Cordelia thought that he was probably being shy and didn’t worry about it. He was interested in that, but he probably just wanted to wear a knight’s armour.

“If you’re asking for my personal taste and not the general opinion then..... Let’s see, I think that I prefer people who don’t lie too much.”

Of course, Cordelia didn’t think that all lies were bad.

Cordelia, herself, thought that circumstances may justify a lie. Therefore, she didn’t believe that all lies were bad, but she thought that lies should be kept to a minimum. At least, that was what she expected from people who were involved with her. She wanted to eliminate any possibility of being involved in unnecessary trouble. She was extremely cautious about information since she knew her hell filled future.

But there was way that she would tell him that much, so Cordelia gave a non-committal answer.

In the first place, it shouldn’t be unusual to like an honest person. That’s why I answered him like that..... But, did I imagine it when I saw the corners of his mouth twitch? Cordelia thought that as she was about to drink some tea, but she suddenly turned her gaze to the bookmark Gille had given her. *It’s beautiful no matter how many times I look at it.*

“..... That, do you like it that much?”

“Yes. Roses are lovely aren’t they?”

She loved roses even in her previous life, but ever since she was reborn as Cordelia, she felt like she liked them even more so. The roses planted at the Pameradia House were very beautiful. However, more than being impressed by their beauty, Cordelia felt calm whenever she looked at the garden. It was a space where she could relax..... She felt that strongly.

That was why she thought so.

(One day, I’ll make rose essential oils too. But, 50 rose petals are needed for a single drop of oil.)

She thought that it would be challenging to look for a suitable breed, and she still had a lot to work on. She thought that it would be worthwhile, but she needed a significant amount. It would certainly be tricky.

“What’s wrong? You look serious.”

“No, I’ll eventually need a large number of roses, so I was thinking about making a rose garden.”

“Roses? If it’s roses, then you can get quite a lot if you ask Gille.”

Cordelia tilted her head in confusion when Vernoux said that.

“Does Gille-sama know a lot about flowers?”

“Ah..... No, rather than say it’s Gille, it’s his mother. She puts a lot of effort into improving her research, so she has flowers that aren’t on the market as well.”

“Flowers that aren’t on the market? That’s amazing, but if that’s the case then it wouldn’t be easy for me to obtain some, now would it?”

It would be different if they belonged to Gille himself, but they were his mother’s, and it would probably be difficult for her to hand over her research materials. She wasn’t that close with Gille either, so she hesitated to ask that of him. In the first place, it was hard for her to think that Gille’s mother was cultivating a lot of roses for research, and she didn’t know if they had been tested or not.

However, Vernoux spoke as if he didn’t mind such things, “I don’t think it would be a problem if you said you wanted them, Dilly.”

Cordelia couldn’t understand what he was saying.

“What kind of roses and how many do you want?”

“Let’s see, rather than the colour, I want roses with strong fragrances..... About a few hundred to thousand kilos worth of them, I guess.”

“A few hundr-.....?! What are you going to use such a quantity for.....?”

Vernoux spoke as if he was stiff.

“I also think it’s quite a bit. I also don’t know how much it will cost.”

Cordelia continued.

“I’m researching the components of florae.”

“..... Ah, you seclude yourself in the greenhouse, and you also came to the magic tool shop. Are you going to tear off that many roses?”

“I’m not tearing them, but I will separate the petals.”

She said, and Vernoux groaned.

“As I thought, the things Dilly wants are that kind of things. Even though you said you wanted a flower, you don’t care about the colour.”

She felt like his true voice was mixed in with those words, but Cordelia didn’t dare to talk back. *He’s just talking to himself after all.*

“..... Well, it might be difficult to get them all at once, but if I can find the breed you want, then you could probably cultivate it can’t you?”

“But if it’s still being improved then nothing can be done to increase the breed I want, right?”

To Cordelia, the vital thing about roses was not their appearance, but their fragrance and the number of essential oils they contained.

If they were still being improved, then their colours and shapes would change as well, and Cordelia thought that it would be hard for the roses to be specialised in the aspects she, herself, thought were important.

However, when she pointed that out, Vernoux replied with an answer that she couldn’t understand well, “..... Well, it probably won’t be a problem.”

“..... You have been saying that there won’t be any problems for a while now, but why are you trying to help me this much?”

Moreover, it weighed on Cordelia’s mind that even though Vernoux was commissioning the roses, the person who would be providing them was Gille. She was probably bothering him.

Then Vernoux laughed.

“Can’t you guess?”

Vernoux said provocatively and lightly glanced at the bookmark in question.

The conclusion that Cordelia came up with when she saw that was that it was possibly an 『apology』.

“If he’s feeling sorry then I don’t think it’s something that he should worry about that much.”

“That’s not it..... Well, never mind. I’ll try asking Gille whether they have any breeds with strong fragrances. “

“That would certainly be a great help, but.....”

Somehow, she was unsettled and didn’t feel at ease. *I wasn’t trying to gain his gratitude, so did I just perhaps acquire a massive debt?*

“By the way, when do you want it by Dilly?”

“..... If possible then within 6 or 7 years. The sooner I can get them the happier I’ll be.”

It was decided that if you start researching then the sooner, the better.

However, at least for now, she didn’t have much use for them. Various good effects could be obtained from balm, but it could have an adverse effect if one weren’t careful about how to use it. All the more so for young bodies. Cordelia had that knowledge, even if Ronnie’s analysis wasn’t finished yet. Therefore, there wouldn’t be any problems with leaving the rose essential oils until after she became an adult.

It was just that, if it was possible, Cordelia wanted to unveil it on her 16th birthday debut.

Because that would be the time when she’d be at the centre of attention, so she wanted to greet them with her favourite scent..... One that would leave a lasting impression of her. Besides, the 『Cordelia』 inside of the game had an appearance that looked good with roses.

She wanted to make a rose fragrance for 『her sake』 and, not for 『the sake of others』 .

However, Vernoux was confused by her answer.

“I thought you’d need it more urgently since you said you wanted it, but you sure are taking it leisurely. Well, if that’s the case, then it’ll work out somehow.”

“However, Vernoux-sama, I’m not asking for the impossible. I also plan to look for them myself, so I’m not asking something unreasonable from Gille-sama.”

“I wasn’t thinking of saying that it’s unreasonable. Ah, you don’t need to refill my tea. I’ve already finished my business today, so I’ll be going back.”

“Oh my, that’s so soon.”

Vernoux’s words were surprising since he usually stayed longer.

Vernoux always asked for seconds of tea before going home. The new tea leaves that she had obtained today also seemed to suit Vernoux’s tastes, but he didn’t command Emina for seconds as she prepared to make the second cup. How rare.

Vernoux noticed that Cordelia was thinking such thoughts from her gaze and said.

“I have to bring this to Gille, who’s eagerly waiting for it while behaving himself.”

“Speaking of which..... What kind of person is Gille-sama?”

“Huh?”

“Because I don’t interact much with people my age. Is he your friend..... or relative, Vernoux-sama?”

Vernoux opened his mouth to speak at Cordelia’s question and then closed it. Then after he let out an idiotic sound, “Uh.....” he gave a vague reply, “Well, I’m sure he’s my friend.....”

It was very suspicious. Compared to his usual attitude, his attitude seemed more appropriate for his age; she felt like he was acting a bit like a panicking primary school student. That was extremely suspicious.

Seeing Vernoux act like that, Cordelia was suddenly struck with the idea that Vernoux might be hiding something outrageous.

“..... Could it be, that Gille-sama is perhaps, a woman?”

“Huh?”

“Perhaps you two were in the middle of a tryst, and so she dressed as a boy in order not to stand out.....”

It was normally an unbelievable story, but it might be believable if Vernoux was the one who planned for Gille to go incognito..... It was only an idea she’d come up with, but it seemed most fitting once she’d voiced it. Indeed, he probably didn’t want to say it if he was with the one he loved. He was probably embarrassed.

In contrast to Cordelia, who thought that and began to form an understanding, Vernoux gradually twisted his face.

“Don’t joke around. Gille is definitely a man!”

“Oh my..... Is that so?”

“But, I admit that he does have an androgynous aura to him.”

Vernoux sighed and said, “Well then, see you again,” before leaving.

“..... He evaded it really well, didn’t he?”

In the end, the only information she got from Vernoux about Gille was his gender, and that they were friends, so, in the end, she didn’t know what his identity was. However, they would probably meet again, since they were around the same age, so she probably didn’t need to place such importance on the matter.

Besides, she estimated that she really needed a large number of roses. She would appreciate it if she got some help in obtaining them.

That was a conversion from her previous life so she couldn’t say that it was the same in this world, but a large number of petals was needed if she wanted to make rose essential oils. For example, even with lavender, whose oil extraction rate was lower than peppermint, about 1kg of essential oil could be obtained per 100kgs. However, if she wanted 1 kg of essential oils from roses, then she’d need 20 times that amount. If it were only for her own personal use, then a lesser amount would be fine, but still, that was like saying she would be fine with just one drop.

Moreover, the problem was the breed.

Roses had two kinds of essential oils in her previous life. One was rose otto, which was obtained by the steam distillation method, and the other was rose absolute, which was extracted with a method known

as solvent extraction. Both were expensive essential oils, but absolute was the more expensive essential oil.

Rose otto was extracted from damask roses, which was said to be the most fragrant and valuable amongst the 2000 breeds. For the latter, rose absolute, a flower called cabbage rose was used and, once again, that one also had a flowery fragrance.

Based on that information, Cordelia searched through various books, and even asked her tutors about it..... But, she had yet to find the roses in question. She recently began to think that those same roses didn't exist in this world.

However, if she were to research other breeds of roses, then there was a high chance that she would need to gather various kinds of roses in quantities of a few hundred kilos to one ton. Furthermore, if she left aside otto, the extraction method for absolute oil changed..... In which case, she couldn't imagine how many petals would be consumed just from her experiment in extracting the oil. Even if it weren't exactly the same, if there were flowers that were suitable for strong fragrance essential oil, then there would be nothing better. Therefore, she wanted to find flowers with strong scents as soon as possible.

If it wasn't a nuisance for Gille, then she wanted to accept his good will.

On the other hand, she was worried about why Vernoux was hiding Gille's lineage, after all. He probably didn't have anything to be guilty about, but she was curious.

(By no means did Gille-sama look like a bad person, but I wonder if he's someone I should be cautious about?)

Cordelia thought while ordering Emina to call for Ronnie.

Then, she sighed in the room when she was left alone.

(Though, it's not like I want to doubt him.)

Cordelia felt strongly at times like that.

Even though I am who I am today because I have memories of my previous life, I dislike that I can't face people frankly because of those memories.

However, she couldn't cast those notions aside.

In the first place, she was thinking about avoiding her own death in the beginning, but if things really went according to the scenario, then it would also lead to the downfall of the Pameradia House too.

(Though it's a bit excessive to say that I would protect the Pameradia House when I'm the one who will become the trigger——.)

She didn't know what would be the trigger for her to go astray. No matter how much she thought of being careful, there was no way she could live without doubting people.

"But then, I can't deny that I'm enjoying the present."

Well then, how troublesome, she thought and smiled wryly.

She wasn't planning on amusing herself with a game of seesaw. However, being in the same space as the people important to her made her feel comfortable. That was precisely why she was living every day to the fullest. So that she could keep living in that space, and then; for her to become a beautiful lady.

"That's right. That's why..... First, I have to check Master's glass containers."

For the first time in this world, Cordelia put the tableware back onto the cart with her own hands.

She couldn't say that she wasn't hesitant; however, she had no intentions of stopping.

Because of that thought, she could only think of Gille as 『someone whom she should be a little careful about』 .

↑1 Time, place, occasion – draw attention to a situation or experience that is inappropriate or worth noting

Act 08: The Dignity of a Noble

Ronnie surely said that the magic tool shop's Master would visit the mansion in the afternoon.

Furthermore, at that time he had hinted, "Sorry if he comes smelling like alcohol."

But what did he mean?

It was the appointed time and the magic tool shop's Master, who appeared in front of her eyes, had an appearance utterly different from the person she saw the other day.

He was wearing a jet-black robe, his hair was tied up in a ponytail at the back, and he was dressed in something that could be said to be a magicians' uniform..... In short, he was neatly dressed. Naturally, he didn't reek of alcohol at all.

"Thank you very much for choosing my shop on this occasion."

Cordelia reflexively replied to Master, who stated so, with, "It is I who should say so, I am thankful that you accepted such a difficult request," but it didn't erase the awkwardness.

It seemed that was also the case for Ronnie, who was there together with them.

"Master, what's wrong? This doesn't suit you!"

Master heard Ronnie's words and caught him by the scruff of his neck, then lowered his head.

"You, what are you saying in front of the daughter of an Earl! Or rather, why did you take the Misses out! If I'd known I wouldn't have acted like.....!"

"It hurts, stop it!"

Master's outcry was quiet, but it was loud enough for Cordelia to hear.

It seemed that even if he was buzzed from alcohol from noon at the shop, he was still 『a man with common sense』. Ronnie was like that, so she didn't think much of it, but now that she thought about it, she felt sorry if he became a victim of foul play.

"Master, please don't worry. Ronnie is normally like this after all."

"But, Cordelia-sama, this guy is....."

"It's fine. He's talented. That's more than enough."

She said that, but Master looked like he still had something to say.

"What's with this? Master and Ojou-sama are both being rude. Rather, Master also told me to go to the Earl mansion a while back and said that you wanted to come here too, didn't you?"

"Did you think I'd believe that you were telling the truth in that situation?! ——And, please excuse us, Cordelia-sama."

"It's fine. More importantly, where is the glass container?"

"Y-yes, here is it....."

Master spoke as he presented the glass container to Cordelia.

The glass must have been affected by magic power because it wasn't entirely transparent; it had a slightly pale pink tint to it. The reason why Cordelia concluded that the colouring was an effect of magic power was that, when she'd touched the glass, the movements of the magic power inside of her changed and was drawn towards the glass.

"Well then, I'll confirm it."

Cordelia spoke and placed the glass container on the already set up apparatus. Then, she put the mint inside of the container. She had already prepared the distillation water and cooling system, so all that was left was to add heat and channel magic power so that she could validate the glass.

"From here on out, I will have Master see whether my magic power reaches the medicinal herbs inside the glass container. However, I ask you not to let a word of what is being done here to anyone."

"I understand."

"Then, I'm going to start."

Cordelia exchanged a glance with Ronnie and then lit a fire in the lamp to start the heat. Before long, vapour began forming slowly and moved to the distillation kettle. There, Cordelia held her hands towards the glass container and felt for the magic that flowed within her. When she did that, the magic power wasn't just being channelled into the mint, it moved towards the mint as if it was drawn to it. She didn't feel the magic power being repelled by the glass and the magic was easily absorbed into the glass. It passed through the glass as naturally as water flowed.

"Woah..... As expected of Master! This is a completely new type of tool, isn't it?"

"It was a magic power that I've never seen before, so I didn't know what path I should make to let it pass through the glass, but this is the result of..... the trial and error."

Master answered Ronnie's question and weirdly ended his sentence. [1]

Cordelia smiled a little wryly. *You don't have to be that nervous*, she thought.

But the glass was really fitting for Cordelia. However, she thought that Master would get even more nervous if she'd said that aloud, so she decided not to say it today and wait for the next opportunity to tell him. Unlike ordinary glass, she could still supply magic power at a stable rate even while thinking such thoughts. *With this, I can have simple conversations even while refining.*

She thought and asked Master.

"How much would it cost?"

"No, the bill is fine. However, I will charge you starting from your next order."

"What do you mean by you don't need the bill?"

"To tell you the truth, in the process of making this glass container, I developed something that seems like it will sell very well. Although it's a lamp, by channelling magic power in a different way than normal, the hood transforms into something that looks like waves. This was made coincidentally and

would have been impossible if not for Cordelia-sama's commission. As thanks for that, I would like you to accept this glass, free of charge."

Master spoke and handed Cordelia a list that he'd prepared beforehand, "Your next commission will be charged at the prices listed here." In brief, the fee for the glass differed by size, so the costs were varied. Also, the price of the lamp was written at the very bottom of the list. That was probably the by-product that Master had just spoken about. The stance of 『if you want it, then buy it』 in this section was rather amusing to Cordelia.

"I understand, thanks."

"Not at all, I'm the one who should be thanking you."

"Just now, I was conducting an experiment to extract the ingredients from medicinal herbs; in the future, I will need small bottles for storage purposes. Can I count on you for that as well?"

"Of-of course! When you have time, we can have a meeting to talk about the details."

"Fufu, thanks."

It's interesting to see how Master is more nervous than the other day.

Cordelia thought that while observing him, and Master was also observing Cordelia's experiment with interest.

"This experiment, is it evangelism from a foreign kingdom?"

"You're wrong Master. This is a new experiment of Ojou-sama's own devising. Amazing, isn't it? Even though she's this small."

In place of Cordelia..... Or more like, before Cordelia could answer, Ronnie, replied proudly, praising Cordelia as if it was his own achievement. At least, Cordelia wanted him to be a little more modest. It was embarrassing.

But it wasn't like Ronnie was praising her, he'd just blurted it out without thinking.

"..... I've heard that high-ranking people liked to follow precedents, but that's not the case, is it?"

"You mean that nobles are obstinate, don't you?"

Ronnie said something vulgar in reply to Master, he was behaving like he usually did.

"Shut your mouth, Ronnie."

However, Cordelia was already accustomed to him acting like that.

She ended it with, "It's Ronnie, after all." If one were to say something like that to a noble, then they wouldn't bear with it at all, but fortunately, Ronnie knew how to get away from such nobles. His etiquette wasn't proper, but he was really good at running away quickly.

"Ronnie's words aren't necessarily wrong. I'm also not all that familiar with noble society yet, but from what I hear, there are a lot of nobles who hate unprecedented things."

Master looked at Cordelia in surprise since she'd agreed.

Cordelia smiled and continued.

“In the first place, there are very few who would go out of their way to find a different method to do things if everything is going smoothly. However, isn’t that the same for everyone, regardless of whether they are noble or not?”

“..... Cordelia-sama, you sure look at things in quite a calm manner, don’t you?”

“It’s not to the extent where you could call my mannerisms as calm.”

“You’re too humble. As expected of a daughter of the Pameradia House. Cordelia-sama, the timing of bringing new things into the world is a business opportunity. Just like with my lamp this time. I pray that your experiments will yield good results.”

Of course, I’m aiming for that..... was something Cordelia didn’t say.

She received that advice because Cordelia looked young..... She was actually eight. She knew about the matter this time, but she didn’t have any knowledge about how to be a merchant. Therefore, from there on out, she might be taught various things about business.

Cordelia grinned and added in her mind, *I’ll rely on you here on out too.*

Next, to Cordelia, Ronnie let out a thoughtless, “Ah.”

“Ah, that’s it. That’s how it is, isn’t it?”

“Ronnie?”

“Well, Master is also amazing, isn’t he? I didn’t think of this, but if Ojou-sama succeeds in business, then that means there’s a chance that she’ll earn a fortune in the future, right? I’m really looking forward to seeing what Ojou-sama will do with her profits. It seems interesting.”

“..... It seems interesting?”

Cordelia frowned, not quite grasping what Ronnie was trying to say.

However, Ronnie continued speaking with a smile.

“Because you know, both the greenhouse and this lab..... even dresses and jewels, the master buys all of Ojou-sama’s things for her, doesn’t he? Isn’t it fascinating to see what an Ojou-sama, who has everything she wants, would do with their newly acquired wealth? It’s also amusing to see you put it in a savings box like we do, but you won’t do that kind of thing, now would you Ojou-sama?”

“You have really bad taste, you know.”

“Please say that I’m honest!”

Master chimed in at Ronnie, who was laughing, and Ronnie brushed him off.

His gossip-like remarks were certainly not in good taste.

However, more than that, Cordelia choked on those words.

“What I want with the fortune I get.....?”

Those unexpected words continued to turn in Cordelia's head, even after Master had gone home from delivering her goods.

She'd naturally thought about gaining profit. Raise her market share in one go with the balms that would have lowered the distribution costs. Then, make connections with influential nobles and obtain information. She had established that as the starting goal. Naturally, she also thought about raising her profits. However, the thing that she really wanted was information. She thought that it would be good if she could negotiation with balms as the weapon.

Therefore, she didn't think much about the profits that would be generated.

It was just like Ronnie had said, all the things she needed were always prepared for her by her father, Elvis. Whenever she wanted jewels, dresses and shoes, Elvis would arrange merchants to come to the mansion. She could even borrow most of her laboratory tools from the magician's wing. There weren't many things that needed to be made especially for her, like the glass.

(..... If so, then that's money I can afford to be flexible with, isn't it?)

However when she thought that, it was difficult for her to find the answer straight away.

For example, paying for all the things that Elvis had given her up until now..... It wasn't like she couldn't use it in such a way. However, it was probably undesirable. It would make it seem that she was trying to take credit for all the experiments she'd started with Elvis's assistance, and it would also look as if she was returning her presents with money. Above all else, it would be an impossible choice if she considered his position and pride as an Earl.

However, even if she thought of other uses for it, she couldn't estimate how much profit she would make at that point in time. In the first place, the essential oils themselves were still at the experimental phase, and it would still take a while for them to become balms. It was difficult for Cordelia to make a plan with an unknown budget.

(But, if I can get my hands on a large sum of money, ——— then I would certainly respond to the expectations, and would probably try to use it in ways that are only possible for nobles, maybe.)

Even Cordelia understood that she could only start the experiments because she was born as a noble. Therefore, it would be nice if she could use that money to contribute to something as a noble. Thinking that Cordelia wanted a new goal, a direction she should aim for; even a rough goal would be fine.

But what can I contribute to as a noble?

Cordelia stumbled from the very beginning. In the first place, Cordelia only had knowledge gathered from books, so she was ignorant about the state of affairs in the world. The general knowledge of nobles had been drilled into her, but it was difficult for her to come up with an immediate answer to questions like; who are nobles, to begin with, and how exactly do they differ from commoners?

Of course, it wasn't like Cordelia wasn't taught anything about what nobles were at all. For example, her tutor taught her that, 『Nobles are the King's loyal retainers and they have the respectable position of being a role model for the people』. “Therefore they are respected by the people and possess many privileges,” the tutor had said.

However, there were many aspects that Cordelia couldn't understand with just that. To make time for her experiments, she had avoided quarrelling with the tutor, so she didn't pursue the matter too deeply; but, in the first place, what was 『a role model for the people』? Those words lacked specifics. Therefore, she couldn't imagine the appearance of a noble who was a role model for the people. The words 『King's loyal retainers』 was the same.

Of course, that might just be the noble stereotype. But, if that was so, then Cordelia didn't understand what a 『noble』 was.

(What's for certain is that that they are people who preserve a status system due to their bloodlines, and they are given special privileges because of their position. But that shouldn't be all there is to it.)

She didn't think that the Pameradia House would be sustained with just those words. There were selfish people like Ronnie there, but the Pameradia House's servants didn't 『only serve』 the house; she could see that they worked to the bone for the house. There must be a reason for that, and there might be a figure of a noble who should be respected there.

“Hey, Ronnie. The existence known as nobles, what kind of existence do you think they are?”

The timing was just right, Cordelia thought and asked Ronnie.

Ronnie tilted his head in curiosity.

“Ojou-sama, I'm the wrong person to ask that question too!”

“Huh?”

“If you want to ask that question, then you should ask great sempai, shouldn't you?”

Cordelia finally understood what he was trying to say.

◆◆◆◆◆

Cordelia was facing Elvis.

Earl Pameradia, the great sempai of nobles..... Elvis didn't have to go to the castle today and was doing fief work in his own home, so Cordelia tried to ask the butler, Hans if she could have some of her father's time.

She had asked Hans to immediately inform her when her father became available, but because it was her, Elvis had said, “It doesn't matter when you come,” she could meet with him straight away.

Elvis seemed busy, as usual. She felt terrible for making him spare some time for her while he was busy, but her desire to ascertain facts won over those feelings.

It was just that Cordelia wanted to get an answer not only from Elvis but from Ronnie as well.

The things I can learn from Otou-sama are 『the way nobles think and how they ought to act』.

Ronnie didn't answer me and said, "I'd rather not, it's embarrassing!!" but what was embarrassing about it?

In any case, Cordelia was currently in Elvis's private room, facing him from across the table. She got strangely nervous when he faced her again.

"So, what business did you come for?"

Elvis directed some unfriendly words at Cordelia in their first father-daughter conversation in a long time. However, Cordelia also wasn't surprised by that aspect of Elvis. She was nervous, but that was how he usually acted, so she understood that he wasn't displeased or anything.

Cordelia made up her mind and got straight to the point.

"What are nobles?"

"Nobles are people of the ruling class."

Elvis immediately answered.

His answer was frank and simple. At least, Cordelia felt that they weren't words the head of a prestigious Earl House would say. *What does he mean?*

However, Elvis continued without worrying about Cordelia's confusion.

"Therefore, nobles are responsible for supporting the country and maintaining public order within society. People who have an obligation to pursue ideals under that great cause..... That is a noble."

Elvis stopped talking for a moment and looked directly at Cordelia.

Cordelia instinctively held her breath and felt tension run down her spine. Elvis's aura was different than usual.

『Earl Pameradia』 was here, that was what she felt.

"For argument's sake, if there were no people in a fief, then it would just be a prairie. However, wealth is created because people live there. It's also fine to think that the fief is protected by the people. Therefore, we nobles must protect the lives of our people. Some nobles work for a great cause, some are deceitful, and there are a considerable amount of nobles who will show their vanity. They're the same as beasts. If we can't always be proud of ourselves, then the dignity we possess is nothing but rubbish."

Elvis said indifferently, but his voice certainly resonated the weight of his words. The reason she believed so was because of his tone and the heavy aura that he was burdened with.

"..... What kind of ideals do you have, Otou-sama?"

Cordelia asked, even though she had seen her father for many years, she felt as if this was the first time she'd seen 『her father, the noble』. Her tension increased as she asked that question.

But the aura around Elvis softened, probably because Cordelia had chimed in.

“My ideals are vast. So vast, that I can’t talk about them all in a short period. At present, I’m mainly thinking about agrarian reform in our fief.”

Elvis said and stood up. He picked up a single bundle of paper from the pile of documents on top of his desk and handed it over to Cordelia.

Cordelia dropped her eyes onto the bundle of paper and confirmed that, even though the letters on the documents were scribbles, they were still written beautifully. Elvis’s meticulous writing showcased the fine properties of the plots, the improvement plans and comparison data such as similar crops to those plots. When she flipped the page, the draft design of a waterway came next. An experimental proposal to transfer magic power in the air to the water using a water wheel was also mentioned. Also, the names of many botanists and geographers were also written down.

“At this time, the Pameradia fief has a lot of major roads for trade, and it probably holds one of the top ranks in terms of prosperity in urban areas in this kingdom. The mountains are also abundant with magic power, and the quality of wood is top grade. The grade of the crops is also high. However, on the other hand, the efficiency of crop harvest isn’t good. There are also surpluses, due to the size of the land, and it wouldn’t be surprising if more crops are harvested than what is available.”

“So far..... For example, at the time of the Predecessor-samas, did they not observe the fields that much?”

Since the Pameradia magic had good affinity with plants, isn’t it possible to select plants that are suited to the soil, or perhaps improve fertilisers by mixing it with magic power?

Elvis opened his eyes wide in surprise at the unexpected question and then narrowed them immediately.

“Did the tutor not teach you about the history of the Pameradias?”

“U-umm, just a little.....”

“You probably only heard that we are descendants of an equestrian tribe. This is a good opportunity. I’ll talk a little about the history of this House.”

Elvis said and began to talk about the general history of the Pameradia House.

According to him, the Pameradias were initially a former equestrian tribe who settled down in the current fief long before the nation was established. The area was a crossing point for trade in the east and west since those days, but the land itself was extremely barren, and they couldn’t let horses rest there as they’d liked; so the area didn’t flourish. The fief was only a crossing point. However, the family of the equestrian tribe’s chief were people who had initially lived in prairies and had the power to grow plants.

“That family used their magic and improved the land so that they could grow crops in the surrounding areas. It took many generations and the variety of crops that could be grown in that area also increased. Eventually, even people from other places also gathered there, and the chief’s family governed the people as the feudal lord. Afterwards, the mountains and forests where greenery grew thick also became a part of the fief, and it grew to a scale close to the current fief. A few generations later, they also assisted in the founding of this very kingdom.”

“In other words..... even if the situation right now is insufficient from father’s standpoint, the land is sufficient enough if the people recognise the House.”

“Yes. The improvement of the land wasn’t only conducted a long time ago, but each new head of house has also tried to improve the land, but that has also been stagnated for about a century. At the very least, it didn’t seem like the previous head cared much about it.”

That makes sense if I put it in a bad way, then would it be something like the previous head just resting on the laurels of the past influences?

She knew that their ancestors had been an equestrian tribe, but it was the first time she’d ever heard something like that. She never knew that the Pameradia’s magic helped build a city and triggered improvements to the people’s livelihoods.

Cordelia’s head was spinning with thoughts on what the fief, which she’d never seen before, was like and then she heard Elvis say, “I’m sorry.”

“I don’t know about what the previous head was thinking, and I’ve never thought about understanding his thoughts either. Therefore, I don’t feel the need to think about it.”

The last thing Elvis’s said seemed like he was spitting those words out and his words were colder than usual. Even his eyes, which were usually a warm colour, felt as if they’d frozen over.

(..... Speaking of which, when Otou-sama hit me, he probably had the same look on his face.)

The first time she’d rebelled against father, —— or rather, the day that she’d commence the 『I love Otou-sama! attack』. She faintly felt that he had the same expression on his face at that time. 5 years had already passed since then, but his aura felt the same as that time.

The former head and his wife..... In other words, Cordelia’s paternal grandparents had already passed away, and she knew it. However, she’d never heard about the previous head before.

“Cordelia you should remember this. You need power to achieve your goals. Authority is not something that you recklessly flaunt, but sometimes it’s necessary to show it.”

“For example..... At evening parties and such?”

“There’s that too, but, for example, the greenhouse that I gave you, —— that was made using the Pameradia’s technology and knowledge. If someone were to see it, they would fully understand the Pameradia’s power, wouldn’t they? That greenhouse possesses technology that not even the Royal Family has, and is something that even the Queen secretly snuck over to see. It is also a testament to the power of the Pameradia House.”

(..... Eh, the Queen?)

Cordelia felt like she heard words that bothered her greatly amid a serious conversation.

“People will look down on you if you get regarded as having no power, and be forced to expend unnecessary effort. Anyway, it might be too early to tell you this, since you are still young.”

Elvis said, his expression had softened quite a bit.

Cordelia was somewhat relieved by his expression, and her tension was also completely gone.

If her father, who by no means was being malicious, made someone flinch with his attitude, then it would be hard to keep going..... She even thought that she would be the same; his expression was just that cold when he mentioned his predecessor.

In the future, I wonder if it's necessary to not be wavered by heated conversations, such as these, in noble society..... It's probably necessary. Although she thought that the road ahead of her would be rocky, she temporarily postponed those thoughts.

Of course, she had confidence that she could employ the tactics of someone older than 8, but that wasn't good enough to win against an Earl who had amassed many life experiences. That was why she was using the honesty of a child.

Cordelia smiled like a little kid and frankly told Elvis.

"I'm not as much of a child as Otou-sama seems to think!"

"Is that so?"

Elvis didn't deny her words. He might have just brushed it off, but she would be happy if he did agree with her a little.

In the end, she felt that the answer Elvis gave her was vague. But as a principle, ——— she vaguely understood the course of action that a head of the Pameradia House should aim for.

And then, a problem also emerged.

"But..... I don't have the confidence to become someone like Otou-sama."

She understood the general notion.

However, it was a different matter if she asked whether she could be like him at all times. Especially towards the things that made Elvis speak about what nobles were without hesitation; the awareness that Cordelia held was only from things she'd learnt in her lessons and wasn't something that came from within her.

How far can I carry an ideal that didn't come from my own thoughts?

However, Elvis narrowed his eyes while Cordelia was worrying.

"How foolish."

He said curtly and placed his hand on her head. His hands were huge.

"I merely responded as someone older than you. It's important to remember that such ideals also exist. You should search for an answer that satisfies you. It's useless to try and imitate me."

"..... Huh?"

"It might make sense to initiate someone in the beginning, but if you stick to it, then there would be no progress past the starting point."

She didn't see any hesitation in Elvis's tone as he stated that.

“You’re clever. If you don’t get caught up in being overly self-conscious, then as a noble..... No, as a person, you probably won’t lose your way.”

Elvis declared and removed his hand from the top of Cordelia’s head.

“..... I’m relieved to hear you say that, Otou-sama.”

Cordelia didn’t say it to flatter him. She just felt that she could genuinely be proud of herself if she had Elvis’s word on it. Elvis wasn’t putting on airs, he was just stating what was true for him, and Cordelia felt a strong feeling of a 『noble』 coming from him.

“Well, having said that..... It’s probably impossible for you to understand without proper experience. If I can get a long break in the near future, then I’ll take you to the fief. You may find the answer you seek by broadening your horizons.”

“Really?!”

“Yeah. The books on this bookshelf are about the fief. I don’t mind if you take them with you. The medicinal plants you like so much are also written down in them.”

“Thank you very much!”

Cordelia naturally smiled because she got a thrilling promise from Elvis.

Elvis glanced sideways at her and returned to his desk where the stacks of documents were.

Cordelia approached the bookshelf, mindful not to disturb him and the sound of door knocks resounded throughout the room.

The person who had appeared was Hans.

“Excuse my intrusion, Master. Marquis Flantheim is here.”

“..... I only have a bad feeling about this. Send him away.”

“That is impossible, Master.”

Elvis gave a long sigh at the Marquis, who was apparently like his son and came today too without giving any advance notice.

“We don’t need tea. At any rate, it must be a troublesome matter or something stupid. There’s no need to entertain him. You don’t need to come.”

“Certainly.”

Hans respectfully saw Elvis off.

Hans smiled gently at Cordelia in the room without its occupant.

“Please let me know if there are books out of your reach.”

“Let’s see..... Then that one over there.”

“Certainly.”

Then Cordelia asked Hans while receiving the book.

“Say, Hans. I have something to ask you, is that alright?”

“Anything.”

“I heard from father that the Queen came to see the greenhouse, but when was that?”

“The Queen came two days after Ojou-sama went on a ride with Isma-sama. She came together with His Highness, the Crown Prince.”

Hans, who had said some extremely auspicious word for Cordelia, looked gentle as always.

(The Crown Prince!!)

So it was like that, huh, she thought, but on the one hand, she was relieved that they didn’t meet.

At least with the near miss, she didn’t have to worry about having stepped on a landmine without knowing. *That’s great.*

She hadn’t shortened her lifespan without knowing, but it was still bad for her heart. Her heart was still racing, even though she knew she’d been saved.

But in contrast to Cordelia, Hans continued to speak softly.

“The greenhouse is the embodiment of amazing technology, is it not?”

“As expected of Otou-sama.”

“Yes. Master couldn’t help but make it because Ojou-sama is so cute.”

“Eh?”

Cordelia, who was relieved, made questioning sounds at Hans and tilted her head in confusion.

The flow of the conversation changed a little? As she wondered that, Hans continued while grinning.

“One day, Master suddenly finished all the matters that he had to deal with and demanded the construction of the greenhouse that had been planned several years ago. He reasoned that he wanted to grasp the current state of technology. He was acting out of the ordinary, and even I was surprised.”

“Was it that sudden that even you, who has always been by father’s side, were surprised?”

“Oh, I was just talking to myself, and I wouldn’t bother to lie when I’m talking to myself!”

It seemed that Hans wasn’t only an excellent butler, he was also quite a cunning man. “It’s a secret,” Hans kept saying as he put his index finger to his mouth.

“Master also knows that Ojou-sama is working hard from the reports he receives from Ronnie. The renovations of the detached building were probably also the results of his expectations. It’s the Master we’re talking about, so he definitely has other reasons for it as well.”

Cordelia felt as if she was turning red from listening to Hans.

(Ronnie!! There should still be almost nothing to report about; there shouldn't be!! Otou-sama, you're going to put pressure on me if you expect too much. It's easier for me if you just remain as a doting father.....)

Those complaints flashed through Cordelia's mind. And then, she was filled with the desire to not betraying those expectations.

"That's right. First of all, I want to decorate this room with flowers, so that they'll heal Otou-sama's tiredness. Hans, please help me select some vases and flowers."

"Certainly, Ojou-sama."

Hans respectfully bowed to Cordelia.

"Otou-sama's heart seems to be breaking for the people, but it doesn't seem like he cares for himself much. So, I'll take care of him in his place."

Cordelia said and slightly smiled at the chair that was without its occupant.

↑1 He's was being informal by using 'da' then he ended it more formally by using 'desu'.

Act 09: Recruiting Ojou-samas as Testers

It was a while after Cordelia had gotten the promise to visit the fief together with Elvis.

Cordelia set out to recruit the female servants, who worked at the Pameradia House, as testers.

She was asking people to be test subjects for the prototype cosmetic products.

Only five conditions were required of the testers.

- (1) Those who can receive a massage using the balms that are currently in circulation for one month.
- (2) Those who can receive a massage using a new medicine after the period for (1) is over.
- (3) Those who are not likely to come in contact with infants.
- (4) The payments for testers will be hourly wages based on the duration of the treatments.
- (5) In the unlikely event that any harm comes to the tester, the Pameradia House will bear responsibility and provide them with medical treatment.

Cordelia judged that these conditions weren't bad.

It wasn't like the wages of the workers at the mansion was low, but first, there was the appeal of earning extra wages.

And the other more significant appeal was that 『they could use balm that only higher rank nobles could use and receive massage treatments』. It was a luxury that was definitely hard to obtain with just their regular wages.

However, she couldn't get good reactions from those conditions, and she didn't meet anyone who put their name forward for the trials.

Cordelia thought that one of the reasons for this was probably because there were people who thought, "This is too good to be true."

At the same time, another reason could be that they were restraining themselves thinking, "Other people probably want to apply for it."

(If they have other reasons, then it'll probably just be that they don't know how serious I am. Too bad, I'd expected these reasons.)

They probably assume that she wouldn't announce it herself and, considering the atmosphere of the mansion and the subject that she wanted to transmit, it wasn't unreasonable for them to think that. No matter how good the conditions were, she could understand that people would be perplexed by it.

(Well, it starts from now. It'll ease my concerns if I can convey to them that I'm really working on this and if I could at least leave an achievement to my name.)

Yes, for example, if someone could become the sacrifice..... Or not, if someone could set the precedence then the problem should be solved.

At that time, she believed that it would be good to inform them, "I'll be recruiting from now on."

“Hey, Ronnie. Do you have any plans on becoming a woman?”

“I don’t. Geez, please don’t say absurd things just because no testers have appeared.”

Ronnie spoke in shock, but it wasn’t like Cordelia was serious when she said that. About 80% of it was said as a joke. The remaining 20% was out of mischief.

There were reasons why Cordelia, herself, didn’t become a tester.

The first reason was that it wasn’t preferable for an 『Ojou-sama』 to use things that haven’t gone through the so-called 『poison testing』. Even if it had undergone analysis, to the very end, the results were only an assumption. There weren’t any poisons in the herbs, but if something were to happen then Ronnie’s job would be on the line.

The second reason was that the effects of the essential oils were a bit too strong for children to use. Especially mint, which caused young skin to get irritated. Also, it wasn’t like it was a fad for children, so there was no meaning for Cordelia to be a tester.

“So what are you going to do? Even though you’ve finally completed the peppermint essential oils and balm at a stable level, there won’t be any progress if you’re hesitating about recruitment.”

“You’re right. But, it’s not really a problem.”

She never thought that applicants would appear just because she had shown that she would receive them warmly. That was why she also thought of other ideas, —— or rather, she had predicted that it would happen, so she picked some testing candidates before she’d even started recruiting.

Cordelia grinned at the maid who was waiting beside her.

“Hey, Emina. Would you help me with something?”

Emina was actually of noble birth, but apparently..... she has been away from home due to her family circumstances. Cordelia also heard that Emina was serving the Pameradia House because Cordelia’s older sister had helped her out. Cordelia didn’t know about the matter in detail, because she didn’t talk with her sister much, and she never really felt the need to ask about it.

Not even the servants knew that Emina had a noble background. Her conduct was so refined that it passed those of the servants, and sometimes they would say, “She’s like a noble,” but they only said that as a joke.

Cordelia also maintained a master-servant relationship with Emina. Emina also only served Cordelia as an excellent maid, so she probably wouldn’t refuse Cordelia’s request.

However, Cordelia didn’t nominate Emina just to be a tester.

It would be nice if Cordelia could offer Emina an environment where she could relax, as thanks for everything she had done. Also, Emina was a very beautiful lady. Therefore, she wanted Emina to undergo an experimental treatment to maintain that beauty.

Of course, she couldn’t deny that fact that it was convenient for her that Emina was of noble birth.

Being a noble, Emina was accustomed to using fine goods. The servants at the Pameradia House were used to seeing fine goods, but it was a different thing for them to be accustomed to using those goods. Cordelia could probably obtain the impression of the products from the viewpoint of a noble. She probably couldn't get a win-win situation from anyone but Emina.

"Me, you say?"

"Yes. I believe that it will surely bring good results for you as well."

"Yes, as Ojou-sama wishes."

Cordelia was satisfied and smiled in response.

"Right, I'll be counting on you then."

Ronnie saw that and muttered.

"That's a good one."

"..... What is, Ronnie?"

"『As you wish』. I've never said it before, but when I hear it being said, it really feels like I'm talking with an 『Ojou-sama』. I'll use it from now on."

"Ronnie, Ojou-sama is always an Ojou-sama."

Emina replied calmly to Ronnie, who was getting a little excited.

Cordelia was used to Emina saying such things.

However..... it wasn't like she didn't feel embarrassed when they are spoken by Ronnie.

"Ronnie, before saying something like that, are the goods that you'd said would be 『done soon』 finished?"

"Ugh..... We-well, they're coming along little by little."

"I'm counting on you!"

"Yes..... Well, it's as Ojou-sama wishes, isn't it?"

He averted his eyes, but why does he look like he's having so much fun from saying that? No, Cordelia also knew that. He was probably happy that he was able to say the words he'd declared he would, straight away. Good grief, I'm glad that he's always having fun.

Cordelia was asking Ronnie if the storage bottles she'd ordered from the tool shop's Master were finished, in other words, making the lids and such.

Essential oils degraded easily. Therefore, she was using coloured bottles to store them, but she also couldn't neglect them being airtight. The lid was important. Also, at least when the bottle was unopened, she wanted the air to be expelled from it and prevent further oxidation because of the gas; she asked Ronnie to research such things..... Well, but him saying that it was coming along little by little meant that his research wasn't going too well.

“Well then, should I give you another job since you’re late with your research, Ronnie?”

“Huh? What is it?”

“Even though we’re testing the efficiency of the essential oils, one person’s help wouldn’t be enough to test everything we want to, right? In short, we’re going to persuade someone else.”

Only Ronnie followed after Cordelia when she left the room. Cordelia had asked Emina to do something else, so she wasn’t coming along with them. In the first place, their destination was the magician’s wing so Emina wouldn’t have been very familiar with it.

“Welcome, Cordelia-sama.”

The person who had greeted Cordelia at the magician’s wing was the head magician, Cecily.

She was a female magician with a slightly fit body and carried herself with dignity. Cordelia believed that she shouldn’t ask a woman for her age, but she also knew that Cecily was quite old, since Ronnie informed her that Cecily often talked about her 10-year-old grandchild in private. Incidentally, she was in charge of supervising the water quality and the water reserves used by the Pameradia House. That involved tasks like preliminary testing for poison and being in charge of developing devices that utilised magic crystals, which were similar to waterworks.

Cordelia grinned and informed Cecily.

“I’m sorry for interfering with your work. I came today because I have something to ask of you.”

“Something to ask of me? What is it you wish to ask me?”

“I’d like you to participate in my experiment.”

“Is this about what Ojou-sama..... Is recruiting for?”

“Yes. But what I would like to ask of Cecily is a bit different from the recruitment terms. Your shoulders have been feeling stiff recently, haven’t they? I think I have a way to solve this so I would like you to try the aroma bath.”

“Aromabath?” [1]

“Yes. I should be able to prepare it in a few days so I would like you to put the essential oils into a tub of hot water and take your time to soak it in.”

Bathing wasn’t a custom in this kingdom.

The people of this world had a very faint concept of soaking in a bath, so the concept of mixing something into a bathtub was the same. The bathtubs that existed in this world were steam baths and functioned like a water jug by pouring water onto your body from the bathtub. It existed mainly as something like a washbasin to draw water from.

“Take my time soaking in it.....?”

Cecily asked curiously in affirmation.

Of course, Cordelia only replied with a grin.

“Yes. Please take your time to soak in it.”

“O-okay.....”

It wasn't difficult to prepare an aroma bath. In her previous world, they had a method to mix small amounts of peppermint and lavender essential oils in hot water.

Using the essential oils of her current world, Cordelia thought that perhaps she could gain the same effects with half that amount. Peppermint could increase blood flow and act as a muscle relaxant, and lavender could accelerate metabolism as well as help people relax.

She still hadn't finished extracting the essential oils from lavender, but if she could harvest some more flowers, then she could still conduct the experiment.

(The reason why it's good for Cecily is that it improves shoulder stiffness, but I can't tell her that it also acts as a countermeasure against menopause.)

Peppermint was undoubtedly an excellent essential for Emina to use.

At the same time, it was certainly the best essential oil for Cecily to use.

Besides, she was pro at detecting water quality. She was good at seeing whether it would be harmful or beneficial to her. If she deemed it to be beneficial, then the other servants can't help but admit that it was.

Of course, it wasn't like Cordelia didn't have anything to be worried about. The essential oils that suited each person differed from person to person. She didn't know if the effects would work well for them or not.

The vitality of the plants was originally strong. Her goal was to keep that vitality when extracting essential oils, but there was also the risk of strengthening unwanted effects, or effects that she didn't need at that moment.

However, Cordelia had already learnt the ability to see whether an essential oil was suitable for a person or not.

The biggest hint was the flow of magic power surrounding a person. If she thought about the magic power that caused the bad condition and combined it with the magic power that surrounded essential oils, then she could match someone with essential oil that suited them..... She noticed that while she was learning analysis magic. If there was an effect that she wanted to suppress, then it was probably possible to control that at the creation stage by using magic power. Cordelia still wasn't good at analysing plants, but if she could only use that power, then it was worthwhile to learn analysis magic.

So, Cordelia read Cecily's magic flow and would try to prepare a mint compound, as well as lavender essential oil, that suited only her in three days. Weakening the effects of some components and strengthening those of others, —— was really time-consuming. Doing that for each and every person was probably not suitable for business purposes. However, if she were to give a made-to-order product to someone that held unique information, then it might be useful in the future.

If she had any other worries, then it would be that the preferences for scents varied from person to person.

No matter how good the effects were, people won't feel comfortable using scents they didn't like. She could also understand a person's taste in fragrances from their magic, but she wasn't confident that she knew their tastes.

(But, if I get good feedback from Cecily..... I still don't have enough ingredients, but I want to try making bath salts in the future too. I'll change the effects and methods little by little and make that into an excellent opportunity to let everyone know about my experiments——.)

Cordelia strongly reminded Cecily, "I'll leave it up to you," while Cecily was confused.

Cordelia was merely delighted that her experiment was progressing forward.

↑1 Cecily says it in a way that's unfamiliar to her.

Intermission 01: The Ghost Story of Pameradia House

That day, Vernoux was unusually calm when he visited the Pameradia mansion.

He hid his right arm behind his back when he appeared in the laboratory and spoke to Cordelia with a gentle look on his face.

“Dilly, I have a present for you.”

“..... Vernoux-sama has a present for me?”

Listening to the words themselves was sweet, but Cordelia looked at him questioningly.

This boy had never brought her a present before. Though, he had brought a letter that he’d been entrusted with, to her before.

On that premise, if she looked at his indescribable expression and extremely restless appearance, then she would be suspicious of him; ‘Is he scheming something bad?’ Although she wouldn’t go as far as to say that..... him acting 『shy』 was cute, but at the very least, it would’ve been better if he didn’t turn his gaze away.

(..... Just what kind of troublesome thing are you hiding behind your back!?)

As expected, Cordelia couldn’t help but be suspicious of him when he acted like that.

However, in the hand that Vernoux had vigorously thrust out when he had prepared himself, was an item utterly opposite from what Cordelia thought it would be.

It was white and fluffy.

It had slightly long, droopy ears.

The thing that had charming eyes, which made her want to hug it, was.....

“A stuffed animal?”

It wasn’t a troublesome thing at all. That was without a doubt a stuffed rabbit. The stuffed rabbit that was made out of wool was fluffy and looked like a real rabbit; it was adorable. It was also the same size as a real rabbit and seemed easy to hug.

“So cute.”

Cordelia received the stuffed animal with both hands from Vernoux’s hand and hugged it as if she was hugged a real rabbit. It felt terrific.

She liked animals, but it was difficult for her to have pets because she handled strong scented chemicals and she had few opportunities to pet them. It might be different if there was a 『zoo』 in this world, but she had only seen wild animals from afar.

The destructive power of the stuffed rabbit was amazing.

It didn’t move, but it hit just the right spots and healed her with only its appearance.

“Vernoux-sama, do you really not mind if I have this?”

“Do you think it’s good for me to have something like that?”

Vernoux sighed loudly.

He wasn’t touched even if such a cute stuffed rabbit was in front of him.

He doesn’t know what he’s missing, Cordelia thought and shrugged her shoulders.

“It certainly doesn’t match your personality. So, why did you bring it here?”

With the way he acted, there was no way he bought this for me as a present. Moreover, he made it seem like he was doing this as punishment, so there was no way someone asked him to give it to me.

She thought as she peeked at his face, but his mouth was zipped. However, after a while of silence, he slightly raised both his hands in the air as if he’d resigned. It seemed that he couldn’t stand her staring at him.

“..... Recently, my mother has suddenly started collecting them as a hobby, and she also filled my room with them.”

“Are there a lot?”

“Yeah. I tried to return them to her in secret, but they’re returned to my room before I even notice it.”

“I’m really jealous of you.”

I see, so it was something his mother liked, not him. Everything made sense.

She hadn’t met her yet, but she thought that the Marquis’ beloved wife was someone who surely suited stuffed animals.

Therefore, even if Vernoux grudgingly said, “Is this being forced on me something to be jealous of?” it had nothing to do with Cordelia.

Cute is justice. Of course, I would be jealous.

“You have a wonderful mother.”

“Like I said, what’s the point of me having something like that.....?”

“Isn’t it nice to have it, since you’re a child? It suits you, you know?”

“Say, who do you think I am?”

“But you know, it’s cute, isn’t it?”

Instead, I will keep answering him in this way.

If only by appearance, then by no means did he and the stuffed animal have a bad affinity. *It would be nice if he held the stuffed animal and smiled as service for his mother.* She hated to say it, but he did have a cute appearance.

However, Vernoux wouldn’t agree with that; he might even get irritated if Cordelia said 『it suited』 him.

But isn't it fine every once in a while, she thought; since he was the one who always said she 『acted like a boy』 and 『was weird』 .

“But if Vernoux-sama is willing to give it to me, then I'll accept it without hesitation. I'll also have to give it a name.”

It would be a shame if I gave this stuffed animal a stupid name. What should I name it? In the first place, what's the gender of this stuffed animal? Is it a boy or a girl? She had a hunch that the day would end just by thinking about it.

(Even so, I can put it by my pillow-side if it's this big. If so, then it might become a good item if I stuff the inside with aromas. No, it's adorable even if I just put it on the sofa..... Yes, it's adorable..... I have to name it! Let's put off turning it into merchandise for now.)

She looked at Vernoux, whose presence she'd completely forgotten about because she was so infatuated with the stuffed animal, and his raised eyebrows had returned to their original positions.

“..... I'm surprised.”

“About what?”

“I thought you would at least say something like 『It looks like it'll get dirty easily』 .”

“..... Vernoux-sama, who do you think I am?”

The words she had tried hard to keep in, came out as amazement.

I'm happy right now so it would have been fine if I'd just ignored what he said.

However, because of his words, she did end up thinking, *if I want to commercialise this, then I'll have to think of washing methods and dirt prevention methods.*

“Because you're you, Dilly.”

“I think it would be better if you changed how you view me, Vernoux-sama.”

If she'd said, [that's rude], then he would say, [you too], and laugh.

But his next words were different than usual.

“Well, but that's also not bad. It suits you.”

For a moment she thought, *is it going to rain cats and dogs tomorrow?* She turned pale, and her complexion was probably bad right now.

“..... What's with your expression?”

“It's nothing..... I was just wondering if you have a fever, Vernoux-sama.”

He was probably complimenting her. No, the component of him speaking ill of her couldn't be found in his words.

However, this is probably the first time he's ever complimented me.

That was why after her face had turned pale, she suddenly felt it getting hot.

So what, is it wrong for stuffed animals to suit me? Her strange embarrassed figure changed to a slightly frustrated one. It was very uncomfortable to be complimented by a friend who always hurled insults at her.

However, it seemed that Vernoux also didn't think that Cordelia would consider his words that much.

"I'd behave myself if I had a fever."

"That's true."

Vernoux said that with a shrug of his shoulders and Cordelia brushed it off.

However, she couldn't find any other suitable way to continue the conversation. So Cordelia continued to stroke the back of the stuffed animal to cover that up.

(..... I don't know what to do with this strange atmosphere.)

No, it might have only been Cordelia who thought it was weird.

If he was complimenting her then she should say, "Thank you," but she was reluctant to say that to his face. She felt like he would make fun of her if she were to do so.

However, the silence didn't last for long. A completely cheerful voice resounded throughout the room.

"Excuse me, Ojou-sama. There's a book I'd like you to read."

"..... Ronnie."

It was Ronnie who had said that while entering the room without knocking.

He was surprised to see Cordelia and Vernoux in the room while holding a book in his hands. He probably didn't know that Vernoux had visited, but it was too late for him to realise it now.

Cordelia resisted the urge to put her hands on her forehead and stared at Ronnie.

Ronnie looked extremely uncomfortable.

"..... If you'd excuse me."

Ronnie, who still had his hand on the door, looked a little stiff as he smiled pleasantly. He would typically leave immediately when Vernoux came over to visit. He probably wanted to close the door and leave straight away. If it were Vernoux, then it wouldn't be a problem if he were to do so. Cordelia nodded at Ronnie as if saying, "Okay, I know." The incident would end there. However, contrary to her expectation, Vernoux approached Ronnie as if he'd come up with something.

Ronnie started shaking violently as Vernoux approached him.

"What is that book?"

"Huh, yes. I've collected this book since a long time ago."

"A History of Magic..... That's a rare book."

Vernoux spoke and took the book from Ronnie's arm, then he turned the pages of the book. Cordelia watched as that happened and decided to help Ronnie who was in a state of chaos.

“Ronnie, why do you want me to read that book?”

“Ah, yes. That..... This is a book I [1]..... I [2] bought when I was a student. I thought that it would be necessary for writing my thesis on the history of magic..... But I didn’t need it after all. I..... I didn’t read it at all, but I thought Ojou-sama would be interested since it’s an interesting read.....”

Ronnie spoke as if he was fumbling over his words. *I see*, she thought.

Vernoux was standing while carefully reading the book, so it probably held interesting information like Ronnie had stated it would.

“These are legends of the various fiefs, but they are all fairy tales based on the assumption that 『people originally had no magic』. There are legends about people originally being spirits, or gaining power by consuming the flesh of demons, and also dreadful things that people can’t see..... That is to say, people developed skills to listen to the voice of the world to overcome ghosts..... There are many stories.”

“Hmm. Well, magic itself is something that beasts can also use. There are also records of people using magic a long time ago, and their magic power varied greatly, so there weren’t many who couldn’t use magic. I think it would be hard to imagine that there are people without magic.”

“You’re right.”

“But, it’s interesting that there are so many legends. These legends probably also reflect the history and climate of the fiefs.”

“Yes. There are notably a lot of legends involving ghosts. There are many different versions.”

Cordelia’s ears twitched while Vernoux and Ronnie were conversing.

There is a lot of different ghosts.....?

“Do you mind if I borrow it?”

“By all means.”

Please take that book away immediately, Cordelia wanted to shout while the two were talking.

She firmly grasped both her hands and prayed desperately for her twitching to stop.

However, such a convenient prayer wasn’t answered so easily.

“What’s wrong, Dilly?”

“..... Nothing.”

Vernoux tilted his head in confusion when Cordelia replied perfunctorily in a flat voice. The gesture was sweet, but she didn’t want to answer such a thing any longer.

Vernoux looks at the book and then back at Cordelia because of how she was acting.

“..... Don’t tell me you’re weak against ghost stories?”

“D-don’t say it like you’re amused. I’m not weak against them.”

Cordelia once again spoke in a flat tone, but she still tried to lie.

However, a very amused expression showed itself on Vernoux's face. Of course, Cordelia received a bad feeling from it, and her feeling had been right.

"How about we make things lively with some scary stories? The weather is also good today, so let's cool off a little."

"It's not that hot. It's rather cool."

"What? Are you scared?"

Cordelia wanted to scream, "Of course," at the grinning Vernoux.

However, she felt like she couldn't scream when she saw his face.

This was a challenge; if she ran away now, then she was afraid that Vernoux would use this as an opportunity to include her in the telling of ghost stories whenever he could. Then it would be impossible for her to escape.

It wasn't a challenge that staked her life, but she couldn't back away from it if she wanted to keep her peace.

I have to win.

And I have to make sure that Vernoux would never invite me to tell a ghost story again.

She decided and smiled at him.

"I'll take you up on the offer. Vernoux-sama, please don't get scared. Ronnie, you sit down as well."

"Huh, me too?"

Ronnie probably didn't expect that she would involve him. Ronnie had an expression on his face that said, 'I want to leave immediately.'

However, Cordelia wanted him to bear with it. *I'll give him any day he wants off later, so he just has to bear with it, for now*, she thought and pretended that she didn't notice his expression.

I'm sorry, Ronnie.

Then, Vernoux sat down with the book still in his hand and Ronnie also sat down in resignation.

He really hates it, after all, Cordelia thought, but contrary to her expectations, Vernoux looked really excited. However, she understood that it wasn't because he liked ghost stories themselves.

"I don't know many ghost stories....."

He groaned and said.

However, her happy opinion of, "Then, let's stop here," was immediately rejected, "Nope." Then, Vernoux eyed the stuffed animal that Cordelia was hugging and said what was on his mind.

"Then let's talk about stories related to dolls. I did give you a stuffed animal after all."

He said something so unpleasant with such a cheerful smile on his face, she thought, but still, she didn't let go of the stuffed animal. She feared that her body would start shaking if she'd let it go. The rabbit stuffed animal was already like a fancy shield for Cordelia.

“Even if I said that it's not really a scary story. I've heard a story about the wandering dancing doll at the Royal Castle. In a certain village, there was a girl who could dance, but she was a little too overconfident. She tried to enter the Royal Castle, thinking herself to be 『The World's Best Dancer』 . But, of course, she couldn't go through the gates because she had no identification papers. She lived in resentment, thinking that the world didn't have good taste and gave birth to a wraith. That wraith possessed a doll within the Royal Castle and walked about doing nothing but say, 『Prepare an appropriate stage for me』 . And that doll still continues to haunt the Castle walls, even after the girl has passed away.....”

Ghost stories were indeed told like this, Vernoux thought as he tilted his head and said. Cordelia screamed inside her mind.

(Wraiths being born from resentment..... Furthermore, her resentments were unjustified. How troublesome was this village girl!)

Yes, if that burst of anger had been directed at me..... She got the shivers from just thinking about it. Her body felt as if it would start shivering. Therefore, it couldn't be helped if her face was turning pale.

But Ronnie was amazed at how Cordelia was acting.

“Ojou-sama, what about that story was scary?”

“It's not scary, the scary thing is.....”

It was impossible for her to express what she was feeling with simple words.

She couldn't say that she was frightened even before they'd started..... There was no way she could declare such words of defeat.

“Then, it's the next person's turn. Will you go after Vernoux-sama, Ojou-sama?”

If they were doing things in order, then it would definitely be her turn.

She didn't want it to be her turn yet, but it would be suspicious if she gave her turn to Ronnie. Moreover, if he were to tell a horrible story, then she didn't have the confidence to speak after him.

“..... Then, let me tell you a story.”

She wanted to escape, but she was the one who had accepted the challenge, so she couldn't run away.

I don't know many ghost stories in the first place, and it's not like I searched for the ghost stories of this world either. However, I was born in a country where many ghost stories were made in my previous life, she thought as she desperately tried to dig up memories from that life.

The story about a staircase having an extra step; the story about the split-mouth woman chasing people at incredibly fast speed and the story about the eyes moving in a portrait in the music class..... They were all scary stories, but I don't feel like talking for too long. Aren't there any other?

However, she recalled a particular ghost story which had a lot of similarities to the other stories.

(I'm reluctant to say it..... But I'm also unwilling to withdraw!)

Then I had no choice but to tell the tale! Girls are brave! I won't give up! I'll let you feel 『Japanese Horror』 to the core!

Cordelia thought and breathed in; then she spoke in a lower tone than her usual.

“A long time ago, there was a beautiful girl in a certain place.”

“A beautiful girl? How old was she?”

“..... Vernoux-sama, please don't interrupt the story.”

5 seconds into her tale, a voice called out, as if it was blowing away her determination, and half of Cordelia's motivation flew out the window. In the first place, if her story was interrupted like that, then she couldn't create a scary mood.

Vernoux said, “My bad,” to the extremely drained Cordelia and lightly waved his hands, but he probably didn't mean it.

“Vernoux-sama, if you interrupt me with something that sounds like a joke again, then I'll stop telling my story.”

“Yeah, ok. So continue talking.”

He urged, and Cordelia sighed.

She had initially wanted to avoid telling the ghost story, even if she'd recalled it. There was a good chance that it would be mixed with a variety of other stories and she felt that if she didn't tell it all in one go, then she wouldn't be able to continue. She didn't want to think about being interrupted without finishing her story when she was so enthusiastic about winning.

“Don't disturb me again this time, Vernoux-sama.”

Cordelia motivated herself once again and began speaking quietly.

“That girl was a maid and served a certain feudal lord. The lord's subordinate plotted his death. However, the lord was aware of that and after some thinking, sent the maid as a spy. Soon after, the feudal lord was able to avoid a rebellion thanks to the maid's actions. However, amid another battle, the subordinate stabbed the feudal lord and seized the castle.”

“That's a fairly cowardly subordinate. Well, if he were going to betray his lord, then he'd at least have that characteristic.”

“..... I'm going to continue. The feudal lord somehow managed to escape, and the maid continued to wait for an opportunity to recapture the castle. However, an underling of the subordinate had already seen through her guise when the rebellion had failed. However, that underling had feelings for the maid and proposed that he would remain silent if she were to marry him. But, the maid feigned ignorance and refused him. As a result, the man felt he had been made fun of and decided to trick the maid.”

“Did he expose her?”

“No. He controlled her. He took a set of ten decorative plates that could be considered as heirlooms and hid one of them away. Furthermore, those plates were important and were stolen from the feudal lord she served.”

“.....”

“Yes, plates. There were no meanings to those plates unless all 10 were together. The maid who was in charge of the plates was accused of the crime and scolded by the subordinate who had taken the castle. She couldn’t bear with it anymore and threw herself into the water well..... Or so it was made to look as if she did.”

“Was she killed?”

“Yes.”

“He’s the worst kind of guy.”

Vernoux said in disgust and continued, “But that doesn’t make this a ghost story.” Cordelia motivated herself again.

“Vernoux-sama, the story doesn’t end there.”

Cordelia lowered her tone again and continued while erasing any emotion on her face.

“From that night on, the subordinate heard the woman’s voice by his bedside every night. One plate. Two plates. Three plates..... No matter how many times she’d counted, she always stopped at the ninth plate and sobbed. When she counted, the plates in the mansion also broke in order.”

“Dilly, hold on..... Your face looks scary.”

“They didn’t see the maid, but the voice certainly belonged to her.”

“Hey, Dilly..... Why is your voice so cold?”

“Before long, a monument was built, honouring her as the guardian of plates. But the man who had tricked her, the subordinate who had taken the castle from the feudal lord and their relatives..... They all began to die, one after the other. But the plates were beautiful, so they were entrusted to a person who didn’t know that there were originally 10. But the person who received the plates..... was also someone who had no connections to the plates. Therefore he was harassed and tormented by the voice.”

Cordelia felt as if her face had become really pale and creepy.

Therefore, she didn’t stop talking, even though Vernoux had interrupted her. Or rather, she couldn’t.

“Listen, you can also hear her voice if you listen carefully.....”

When Cordelia finished talking, the whole place was silent.

After a little while, Vernoux opened his mouth.

“Dilly..... You’re really good at telling stories.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

“Yeah.....”

“.....”

“.....”

“Next is, oh..... It’s my turn, but what should I do? I can only tell stories about drunk men about to be killed by monsters disguised as women.”

Ronnie looked uncomfortably at the two silent youths..... Or rather, he was perplexed by the mood in the room and asked.

However, he had already talked about the contents. They no longer had the thrill of finding out 『what would happen』 in Ronnie’s ghost story.

“..... Shall we finish here?”

“Yeah.”

Cordelia immediately nodded at Vernoux’s conclusion.

Cordelia thought that she was satisfied with what had happened, but regretted that she had taken the ghost story challenge too seriously. However, she wanted to do it even if it meant that they would all be scared together..... The only thing she could assert was that she hadn’t lost.

(I definitely don’t want to tell any more ghost stories ——.)

Cordelia thought and gave a small sigh.

Next, to her, Vernoux seemed to have broken out of his silence and asked Ronnie.

“Aren’t you scared?”

“I’m not really scared of things I haven’t seen myself..... Because it’s in their nature not to be noticed.”

Cordelia was scared of it because it was something visible, but Ronnie was the opposite. *Was he scared of seeing them? What was he scared of? By any chance, was he scared of the Onee-samas’ at work.....?*

She thought. She also considered preparing goods that would help in getting a quiet night’s sleep when she got back to her room. Her fear had already faded, and it would be best if she could get to sleep quickly. She might forget about the stories if she slept.

Ronnie stood up while she was pondering.

“Well, I’ll go prepare some sweets in exchange for not telling a story.”

“You’re right. Let’s have tea.”

It was a sensible proposal. Hot tea with sweet snacks. That should change my mood considerably.

Cordelia thought. Ronnie was still being Ronnie.

“Come to think of it, we acquired a rare teacup, did we not? The cups come together to make a picture. It is said that it would become meaningless if one of the teacups are chipped.”

“Or something like that,” Ronnie continued, and Cordelia and Vernoux turned their faces towards him.

“Let’s use the usual cups.” “I don’t mind using the usual cups.”

Ronnie widened his eyes in surprise at their simultaneous voices and smiled wryly, “Understood.”

The cups and dishes that he had brought were both pure white and had no pictures on them.

Then after a while, whenever Vernoux visited the Pameradia mansion, he would always use those plain, white tableware.

↑1 Informal

↑2 Formal

Act 10: Before Departure

In the afternoon after Cordelia had finished her dance lessons, which she wasn't very good at, Cordelia was happily handling tea utensils. Although she wasn't bad enough at dancing to step on her partner's feet, she couldn't say that it was her forte either.

She wasn't familiar with triple time [1] when she was Japanese. She should be used to life in this world, but having her memories return early was probably a barrier and, no matter what, she couldn't match herself with the triple time. She probably had to keep practising every day to get used to the rhythm. She appreciated that she had knowledge of her past life, but if she had a choice, then she didn't want to remember it.

Therefore, she was refreshing herself by making tea. She knew that the tea would be more delicious if she got Emina to prepare it for her, but she also had fun making tea in her past life. Emina also tried to prepare her tea for her today as well, but she said, "I obtained a new herb, so I want to try preparing it myself." Emina then prepared a pot for Cordelia to use in the laboratory. It might have been difficult for Cordelia to make her own tea in the main building since the other servants were there also, but it seemed that she could make her own pot here.

Cordelia was enjoying her time brewing tea since she hadn't done it in a while, and Ronnie came down from the second floor while carrying a box with both hands.

"Oh, Ojou-sama. What are you doing this time?"

"I obtained a new herb. So I wanted to make herbal tea with it. Do you also want to try some, Ronnie?"

"Yes, the tea that Ojou-sama makes is definitely more delicious than the tea brewed by the maid over there..... Oh, gah, this, I don't like this. It's bitter."

"I was going to tell you that you can add honey to it since it's bitter, but you drank the tea before I could say anything."

Cordelia smiled wryly at Ronnie, who was trying to return his tea with a frown on his face and offered him some honey. She felt like she had an older brother who was a handful..... No, a younger brother?

"..... Yup, honey is great. So, what kind of effects does this tea have?"

"This tea was originally drunk in southwestern kingdoms, and it's a good measure against hay fever."

Cordelia spoke to Ronnie while drinking her tea without putting any honey into it.

The elder herb was a herb she'd found from a research paper on folk remedies. It was a cute herb with small white flowers. The route for obtaining stock had already been established, and she was excited for it to arrive.

However, she had never heard about people in the Royal Capital suffering from hay fever before. She had never seen people of this world use masks before, but their eyes and nose did seem to get itchy..... She also didn't see her servants develop the so-called 'easy to tell' symptoms of hay fever either. A survey conducted on the public concluded that about 30 per cent of the population had hay fever..... This world was probably different. Even if someone had hay fever, there was a high

possibility that they didn't notice it themselves, since only a low percentage of people had it. So if she were to sell it, then she would have to sell it for other uses..... For example, using it as a measure against the cold, but honey wasn't cheap in this world. It might be hard for people to drink it if they were bad with bitter stuff, like Ronnie. If so, then she could add lemon juice and make syrup with it..... Cordelia thought that was good, but there might be people who weren't good with sour things, as well.

(Personally, I like it either way.)

Well, it's hard to get everyone to like it. Cordelia thought that and lightly clapped her hands.

"Well then, let's finish tea time here. The calendula's [2] leach oils should be extracted quite well now. Let's mix it with beeswax."

"If I remember correctly, you were going to make a cream to counter chapped skin. The servants, who work with water, are eagerly waiting for its completion."

Ronnie really seemed to like the herbal tea with honey and served himself another cup while he said that.

She was a little surprised by Ronnie's actions, because they were a bit awkward, and smiled wryly.

She had started it to verify her own work, but as expected, she was happy that people were anticipating her products.

She ignored Ronnie, who had started drinking his second cup of herbal tea, and went to retrieve the leach oils from the shelf.

However, she was stopped by a knock at the door. The one who appeared was Hans.

"Cordelia-sama, the Master is calling you."

"Oh my, he is? I'll go right away!"

He should be at the castle today, how rare, Cordelia thought, but she knew that she hadn't done anything wrong, so her steps were light.

"An inspection of the Fief?"

"Yeah. I thought it would be fine if I took you along with me next month. I've already finished my work. I'm thinking of staying there for a bit longer. We're leaving in 5 days. Be ready by then."

There was no room for refusal from Elvis's words.

However, Cordelia didn't have any reason to refuse. Cordelia bowed once and said, "Understood," and restrained her heart as it beat with joy, and returned to her room. Her pace became visibly quicker.

The first thing Cordelia did when she got back to her room was take out a map.

It was a map of the Pameradia Fief that she'd borrowed from Elvis's room.

The largest city in the Pameradia Fief, Ertiga, was located where the east-west highway collided with the north-south one. Therefore, commerce prospered there, and it was so prosperous that it was also

called ‘the third city’ within the kingdom. Marine products from the south, handicrafts from the north, woollen goods from the west and iron and steel from the east. They also had an abundance of edible fruits.

(But..... This doesn't really tell me anything about the villages that have good quality trees.)

She'd heard from Ishma that the living standards within Parmeradia Fief were relatively high. However, she'd also heard about regional disparity; for example, there were problems in regions with a smaller population than the prosperous Ertiga.

Since it's Elvis, he'll probably tell me about those areas too ———, she thought and raised her face as if she'd snapped.

“No, this isn't the time for me to do this. I was in the middle of making calendula cream!”

She quickly put the map away and hurried back to her laboratory without losing her elegance.

When she'd returned, Ronnie had his legs submerged in a tub full of warm water and herbs and was enjoying the feeling of soaking his feet while reading. He'd said, “I'll participate in the experiment!” as he pleased, but Cordelia thought he was just having fun relaxing. No, rather, there was nothing for him to be tense about. The book he was reading, titled 『Funny Stories from All Eras』, also had nothing to do with work. *If he had nothing to be stressed about, then I wonder if he needs to relax or not..... Well, whatever. It's fine as long as he's having fun.*

Cordelia lightly coughed to clear her throat and informed him, “Ronnie. This is an urgent job. Otou-sama has allowed me to accompany him on his inspection to the Fief. Therefore, I would like to make a gift for everyone at the mansion there.”

It was her first time visiting the mansion in the fief, so she wanted to bring some handmade gifts with her, and she wanted them to see the effects of her products. They still didn't know about her plant collections and experiments, and she was anxious to see how they'd react to it.

(Actually, I also really want to test the effects of balm massages as well, but..... Even Emina is still in the middle of the current balm massage treatment. So I probably won't make it in time.)

Despite feeling a little disappointed, Cordelia cheered up while thinking that her 18-year-old society debut was still postponed for several more years.

Besides, it wasn't bad to attack first with daily goods.

“Ah, then this skin chapping reducing cream would be good, wouldn't it? It's a bit colder over there so they might be happy to receive it.”

“Yes, I also thought about doing that..... Also, I think I'll be riding the same carriage as Otou-sama on the way there.”

“I guess.”

“..... This research started because I wanted to cure Otou-sama's tiredness. So, ——— Ronnie, go do some work that causes stiff shoulders right now!”

Ronnie's eyes became dots, and he turned his head 90 degrees like a broken machine.

"Excuse me?"

"Otou-sama's stiff shoulders probably start from straining his eyes. [3] I'm aiming to make a compress medicine that will relieve him off his stiff shoulders. But I don't have any testers. Hans also seems to have stiff shoulders, but I don't want Otou-sama to notice."

"Ojou-sama....."

"Could you get stiff shoulders, that are the result of strained eyes? 'As you wish, Ojou-sama', was it?"

Ronnie's cheeks twitched as he informed Cordelia, "I can see a demon behind you, Ojou-sama."

In the end, Ronnie's stiff shoulders were something that 'wouldn't even take three days to get if he worked as a normal magician in the magician's wing', so Cordelia immediately sent Ronnie back to the analysis magicians' workplace. She pretended that she didn't see the pathetic look on Ronnie's face.

After Ronnie left the laboratory, she recalled her own memories.

"Warm cloth can be used for shoulder stiffness caused by eyestrain, couldn't it? I can drop essential oils into hot water and dip a towel in to use it..... It's not difficult. It's not like..... Otou-sama has muscle fatigue."

Then, she took out her own research book from the bookshelf and turned the pages with a rustle.

"I could make a good herbal tea if I had hibiscuses or rosehips, but..... I haven't obtained any of those yet, and this has precedence. However, rosemary is useful enough for improving blood circulation. If the blood circulation improves, then so should stiff shoulders. Let's try it next time."

The things that I could do with herbs are increasing little by little. But it's not enough, after all. If I don't increase the variety a little more, then I feel like I won't be satisfied with my experiments.

Cordelia thought while establishing her next goal, "It's better to make a peelable type of hot cloth, rather than just using a towel, isn't it?" This world didn't have the concept of stickers, so making it wasn't easy, because she didn't have the equipment to make it with; but she wanted to make something easy to use, someday. Towels didn't take much time to use, but something easier to use would spread to more people.

"..... Besides if I can complete the sticker-type hot cloth, then I can also give it to Onii-sama as a present. Onii-sama probably also gets bruises, and Onii-sama might also need a muscle fatigue compress."

Although she had such thoughts, the tasks right in front of her eyes were making gifts for people in the fief and Elvis's present.

She left her brother's gift to the side for now and wrote down the important things that she needed. She didn't have that long to prepare. *If I don't use my time efficiently.....* She thought, and Vernoux appeared.

Vernoux, who was being guided by Emina, who was smiling as if she was troubled, didn't know the meaning of the word 'appointment', as usual. No, he probably knew the word itself, but he probably never thought it was something he should use. Especially when it came to Cordelia.

"Yo, Dilly. You look busy."

"..... As you can see. What kind of business do you have today, Vernoux-sama?"

Cordelia spoke while telling Emina to prepare tea and snacks.

"Speaking of which, are you not changing your hair colour anymore?"

Why did he change his hair colour when he went to town with Gille? She thought and asked.

"Ah, that, huh. That's exclusively for the times when I'm not alone. Well, it's something like insurance." He replied vaguely.

".....?"

What is the insurance for? She wondered, but Vernoux put a flower onto the table, and she couldn't ask any further.

It was a bright red rose.

"This is?"

"It's from Gille. When I told him that you liked roses, he told me to bring it with me."

"It's a very..... beautiful rose, isn't it?"

It was a medium-sized rose with a pleasant fragrance, and more than anything, it was fresh. The white petals that were mixed in the centre were also beautiful, and Cordelia had never seen that type of rose before.

"What is this rose called?"

"Ah..... This is a new variety that Gille's House bred, and it didn't have a name until recently. It's called 『Cordelia』."

"!"

Cordelia started choking, but she swallowed it right away.

The name that was given to the flower that hadn't had a name until recently was my own, —— don't tell me it was derived from my name? She thought that, but shook it off to be untrue. Cordelia had been introduced as Dilly and hadn't given her real name to Gille. In the first place, she'd heard that his mother was the one who was improving the roses, not him. Therefore, this was surely a coincidence.

"Then I'll have to improve myself so that I don't lose to this rose."

"Gille said if you like it, then he could share some stock with you. So if you don't mind, could you write him a letter? Gille really wanted to come, but he hasn't been able to sneak out because he's been so busy."

Vernoux spoke while he reached for the snacks that had been carried over.

The way he ate was very elegant. It was so elegant that one wouldn't think he sneaks out.

"Err, Vernoux-sama."

"Hmmm?"

"I want to write a proper letter, so would it be alright for me to give you the letter later? I wouldn't be able to write it properly by the time you leave, Vernoux-sama. If it's necessary, I'll have my servants deliver it."

She said that and Vernoux frowned.

"If you send the letter to my place, it'll be easier to deliver it to Gille..... But, well, can't you write it quickly?"

"Why?"

"Gille is definitely restless."

He said it so seriously that Cordelia spurted a bit.

"Vernoux-sama, you're exaggerating. There's no way Gille-sama would be restlessly waiting for my letter, is there?"

Cordelia giggled at Vernoux who said a joke with an unusually serious face.

"I won't say that you have to give me the letter today, but I want to hear your reply in regards to the flower."

"The flower? It's gorgeous."

"That's not what I meant. About the stocks, do you want some or not?"

She worried a little from being told so.

This rose was gorgeous. It had a lovely fragrance, and she wanted to use it in her experiments. But since it was a new kind of rose, there was a high chance that it was going to be used for commercial purposes by Gille's House. She wasn't sure if ——— it was alright for her to use it.

And, this wasn't something that she could consult with Vernoux about either.

"..... I would like to write about that in the letter as well. Please tell him that it's a gorgeous rose and I could gaze at it forever."

"Alright. Dilly is stubborn, so even if you decide on something you won't tell me."

"Vernoux-sama, I've been thinking this for a while, but if you say something like that to a lady then you'll miss your chance at a fateful encounter!"

Of course, it had nothing to do with her.

Despite his father's emphasis on a fateful encounter, he seemed to be blocking the path to his own fate. Make no mistake, he was headed towards a dead end.

It was a remark Cordelia had made out of concern for him that perhaps it would be better for him to correct it while he was still young, but the person in question, Vernoux said, “You don’t get it, do you?” as he sneered at her.

“I’m not planning to take this attitude if I think it’s my fateful encounter. So it’ll be fine.”

“.....”

She thought that he was a really calculating child, but she wasn’t in a position where she could judge him, so she smiled and glossed it over.

“Vernoux-sama, I’ll watch over you when you find someone you like.”

She could listen to him as a friend and give him advice, but she swore in her heart that she would definitely stay away from it.

(..... That’s right, if I find something unusual at the fief, then I’ll buy gifts for the two of them. I wonder if a special product would be better than something unusual.)

Cordelia was suddenly struck with an idea.

However, she didn’t know what would make boys at that age..... No, boys in general, pleased. She realised that she didn’t know anything about men’s tastes at all.

(L-let’s depend on Otou-sama at times like these)

Yes, Cordelia had a wonderful man close to her..... Her extremely reliable father.

◆◆◆◆◆

The next morning.

Cordelia opened her mouth to ask Elvis a question while having breakfast in a warm, sunny room.

“Otou-sama, there’s something I would like you to tell me.”

“What is it?”

“What kind of goods would make gentlemen happy?”

Elvis frowned a little at Cordelia’s question.

However, it wasn’t an expression that said, “Don’t ask such foolish questions.” His expression simply said, “I didn’t hear you.”

At the same time, the waiter tightened his jaw and choked, *is he okay?*

She thought and repeated her question.

“I want to give a gift to some gentlemen, but I’m not sure what kind of gifts would make gentlemen happy. That’s why I want Otou-sama to tell me.”

“..... A gift?”

“Yes, that’s correct. I’m finally going to the fief, so I want to give them gifts that represent my feelings of gratitude towards them. I want to give them a wonderful product from our fief.”

She didn’t mean to use such difficult words, and the reaction she got from it was incomprehensible.

What’s the matter? Elvis was silent.

She was confused since her father’s reaction time was unusually slow.

“Mm, Otou-sama.....?”

“.....”

“.....”

“..... I can’t tell you anything if you don’t give me information about the person.”

“Ah..... That’s right! I’m sorry.”

I see. Elvis was waiting for my follow-up. I was careless.

She understood the situation, but then she realised that there was a problem.

She couldn’t tell him..... information about them.

Vernoux and Gille were the people who she wanted to give presents to. If she told Elvis their name as a set then, while Vernoux would pose no problems, Gille was someone whom she met when she snuck out of the mansion. She couldn’t say it. If she did then, Ronnie would get in trouble.

(I could just tell him about Vernoux-sama, but I’ll be troubled if he misunderstands.)

Cordelia’s wish was to 『gift a present to her friend』. But, if she only named one person, then it would probably sound like, “I want to give Vernoux-sama a gift.” Something like that sounded just like a girl consulting about love matters.

She thought it sounded charming, but not when it came to her. It wasn’t funny at all. She wanted to avoid such misunderstandings with Vernoux, and her intentions were completely different. Also, she couldn’t image what Gille liked from Vernoux, and she didn’t want to fix his image onto Vernoux.

(I might as well lie and say that the presents are for the servants..... But that would be pushing it, probably. In the first place, the presents might end up being something for people of a different generation..... But I can’t think of any other way to do this.)

It was a bit impossible since she only had a few acquaintances and she had to keep Gille a secret from her father.

(If that’s the case..... Then let’s ask about something that seems like it’ll suit Gille-sama.)

Getting an accurate idea might be hard, but I would be satisfied if I could get some hints on what to get. If I get a lot of ideas, then I feel like I’ll know what to get Vernoux-sama as well.

She thought and told Elvis about Gille’s personality.

“Mhmm..... He’s a very straightforward person.”

“.....”

She realised why Elvis wasn’t replying after she uttered those words.

He couldn’t understand anything with those words. The information was too abstract.

(The best information to have is probably age, but I can’t say their age.....)

Therefore, the only thing she could do was say what she thought his personality was.

“He’s a very modest person.”

“.....”

“And also kind.”

“.....”

“Also..... He’s extremely considerate.”

“..... Flantheim’s son?”

“No!”

Cordelia immediately replied with a firm tone. *How did those words come about?*

Elvis nodded deeply as if he understood her reply..... “If you understand then why did you ask?” She wanted to ask him.

(No, I know why he did it. It’s because Vernoux-sama visits often, but he’s only a friend. It was hard to say that I couldn’t not associate with him, I guess?)

However, Cordelia didn’t think that the word 『honest』 suited him. Gille being modest and considerate was completely opposite of how Vernoux acted. The Marquis’ heir wasn’t very modest and that, in itself, might be a problem.

“Ah, but of course I’m thinking of getting a gift for Vernoux-sama as well. I want to get along well with him.”

“.....”

The words she’d said earlier were about Gille, so she inadvertently denied it before, but she did want to buy Vernoux a gift. If Elvis found out that she’d given Vernoux a gift after refusing it, then he might think that she was hiding her embarrassment.

Cordelia thought over what she said once again while the silence continued.

(But I feel like I’m already hiding my embarrassment.)

She spoke about Gille while protecting his identity, then she denied that she would buy Vernoux a gift, but said that she would.

Whether she intended to do so or not, that was probably how a soft 『Tsundere』 acted.

(I didn't plan to do that, how annoying.)

It was so hard to get the conversation going while hiding Gille's name.

Her impression of him was apparently optimistic.

(..... But I've never given a gift someone of the opposite sex before, and it's enough for me to reflect on this for next time.)

In the first place, the allegations of her acting like a 『Tsudere』 were just in her imagination.

But, just to be sure, she said words that would probably halt the damage.

“I think that Vernoux-sama will become a great gentleman in the future; but, that's only what I think. No matter how much Vernoux-sama grows in the future, he'll never rival Otou-sama.”

It's not like I'm looking at Vernoux-sama with dreamy eyes, Cordelia tried to connect her words with such a thought in mind and smiled in deception.

The words I said aren't lies. My father's fantastic. He's astringent and wonderful. A really charming person. She affirmed in her mind one after the other and then suddenly realised something. *No. If I keep going on like this, then we'll stray from the topic of products. I can't let that happen.*

“So, mm..... What kind of items do you think are good, Otou-sama?”

“.....”

“.....”

“..... Perishables are good. We have sweets and smoked meat at the fief that aren't sold here.”

Elvis gave an acceptable answer after remaining silent for a bit.

(..... Indeed, things like food disappear after you eat them. It'll be superficial even if they don't like it.)

Vernoux was one thing, but Gille seemed like the type of person who would be concern over things like that.

If she gave him something expensive, then he might fuss over it. If she thought like that, then choosing perishables might not be a bad choice. She was a woman in her previous life, and she had a feeling..... that whenever she didn't know what to do, she just gave people snacks as gifts.

(But, sweets and smoked meat? Food is certainly a source of energy so it might be good, but.....)

Cordelia only had a vague and luxurious image of, 『It's practical and it wasn't sold in the Royal Capital, so young men like it』.

She was also anxious about leaving an impression of 『function over aesthetics』 if she gave Gille sweets since he'd given her flowers. Vernoux on the other hand, always came over to her mansion to eat snacks, so she had a feeling that he'd eat unusual snacks as well. As for the smoked meat..... was it something that young ladies gave to their friends? Elvis's suggestions didn't match with Cordelia's expectations in that regard.

In the first place, it wasn't like Cordelia wanted an answer that she could agree with. She'd asked because she really didn't know what gifts to get. Therefore, even if the answer wasn't something she'd expected to get, she thought that Elvis's answer of, 『this is for a general noble man』, might be closer to his tastes.

She wanted to gift them something they would be happy about, that was why she'd asked.

(Well, I might not know what's there, after all, if I don't go to the actual place.)

According to Elvis's advice, it was up to Cordelia to pick which sweets she wanted to gift. If she saw the real products, then she might be able to find something better than what she thought was there. Then, Cordelia felt that she could see a pivot point of various sweets. Of course, she didn't doubt the advice Elvis gave her, because there might be items there that would make her exclaim, "This is it!"

(But, it was the right choice to ask Otou-sama after all.)

Because of him, she now also considered giving food as gifts, when she hadn't before.

"You should ask other people as well. The answer might be similar to mine..... But no matter what, it's always faster to ask the person."

Cordelia nodded at Elvis's answer.

"You're right. Then, I'll ask Isma-oniisama too."

Like Elvis said, it was better to ask other people as well. If it were Isma, then he'd know the fief well, and he was also closer in age to Vernoux and Gille than Elvis was. So, she might be able to get hints from another perspective as well.

Elvis was amazed at Cordelia's thought process.

"You're going to ask Isma?"

"Eh? Yes."

Is it bad to ask Isma-oniisama?

"..... Are you planning to give Isma a gift as well?"

"Huh? Y-yes. I am."

Cordelia immediately replied to Elvis's sudden words, but the inside of her head was full of question marks.

(..... Otou-sama, I wonder what's wrong?)

But, Cordelia also didn't go back to that question. She didn't know what was going on, but it seemed that he'd covered up the story well.

"Isma goes to the fief many times. There's no need for you to fuss over his gift now."

"But....."

"If you're worried about it, then you can bring him back some alcohol."

I see so Isma-oniisama likes alcohol. I appreciate that he gave me a specific item, but it wasn't something that I could give to a child. It wouldn't suit Gille-sama or Vernoux-sama.

Cordelia thought, and Elvis's looked at her with a solemn look on his face. Tension ran down her back when she noticed that gaze.

"Cordelia, let me teach you something."

"Okay."

"There are times when you shouldn't use such sluggish words."

"....."

"If the other party is a man, then you should state his name. Covering it up could lead to big misunderstandings."

Cordelia froze at Elvis's words.

(He really does think that I'm consulting him about love.)

It was unavoidable since even she'd thought in the middle of the conversation. It wasn't strange for Elvis to think so.

Cordelia gave Elvis a smile to remind him.

"I can only be attracted to those who really care about me, just like Otou-sama."

So, you don't have to worry, okay? She informed him with that in mind. Unfortunately, she couldn't guess what Elvis was thinking with his teacup in hand, but the misunderstanding was probably solved..... Or so she would like to think. She would also like to think that she..... reminded him that, "Because Otou-sama cares about me, you won't marry me off without me knowing, would you? Even if it's to His Highness."

However, Cordelia also thought that it would be challenging to ask Isma about this matter if Elvis came to a misunderstanding because of it. She might create a new kind of misunderstanding, and she wanted to avoid that.

(..... Well, if I really can't find the right item for them, then I can ask them at the fief.)

She didn't have to panic just then. She also got a hint, so all that was left was to find a nice item.

Cordelia once again moved the hand that had stopped moving and ate her breakfast.

↑1 waltz, the minuet, and the mazurka

↑2 marigold

↑3 Strained from doing paperwork

Intermission: A Special Plan Written by the Head Magician

A grave aura filled the magicians' wing on that day.

At the centre of the room was the room's owner, the head magician Cecily Tierney..... Her nickname was 『Mentor』 and it felt as if she was looking at documents with bloodlust. A lot of books were piled on both sides of her like a cage.

The eerie aura didn't match up with the beautiful early afternoon weather we were having. *I seriously want her to give me a break*, I thought, but I didn't know what would happen to me if I said that out loud. She might put me in a grip hold; I really didn't want that to happen. Therefore, all I could do was remain silent. *The other magicians are probably not talking for the same reason. I can't be sure though; since I can't speak.*

The day before yesterday, my little master Cordelia-sama left these words with me before she departed for the fief, "I'm leaving things here to you, alright?" *She'll probably reach the fief tomorrow*, I thought, but I actually wanted to go with her. I wanted to pass on staying at the magicians' wing. *At least, it'll be great if the aura of this place returns to normal, even if temporary.*

(It seems like she'll get angry over anything right now.)

A sudden scream filled the room, "I DID ITTTTT!!!" when I thought of coming up with a reason to confine myself in a different room. Needless to say, it was the Mentor's voice.

"Fufufu, this is perfect! With this, we can announce Master's plan.....!"

"Mentor, you look like you're going to collapse before you announce anything! Please sleep. You have terrible eye bags."

"Oh yeah, I didn't sleep because it's a waste of time..... That's right, Ronnie. Go buy me something sweet from Claire's Candy Shop."

"What do you mean 『That's right』!?"

Why was I made into a gofer when I gave advice to my boss? This is unreasonable.

But Mentor ordered me around as if it was the natural.

"You're not going to listen to the request of a pretty girl?"

"The pretty girl is Mentor's grandchild..... Gahh."

I didn't say anything wrong; Mentor had a 10-year-old grandchild, so it was more suited to call her 『lady』 rather than 『girl』, even if she was in a frenzy just before. *So calling her a girl might be rude.....* I had thought, but Mentor was throwing a bunch of papers at me for some reason. It hit me straight in the face. *It hurts. Did she reinforce the paper to protect it, or to increase the attack power.....?* Either way, my nose hurts.

"It's Ronnie's fault this time."

"Yeah, you shouldn't have said that."

The magician Onee-samas, who were doing their work, said that. *Why?*

But, I knew that I wouldn't have any allies if I express my opinions. So, I picked up the paper that was thrown. *I'll be the one who cleans up afterwards anyway if it just gets left here.*

Then I noticed..... *What's with this research?*

"Plan for a bathtub with an automatic water heater.....?"

In short, it was a draft for a bathtub. It was a strange, but peaceful sentence.

I thought and read the title out, then Mentor said, "Thanks for asking," as her black-framed eyes shone.

..... *No, Mentor. You should really sleep. You'll definitely collapse.* But she began talking passionately.

"I noticed this when I tried Ojou-sama's experiment. That, if we want a good result with the experiment, then we first need to build a bathing facility."

"..... Excuse me?"

"The floating sensation in the bathtub is amazing. At first, I wondered why I had to soak in the bathtub, but the warm water felt perfect. But people won't understand if we just tell them that. So, I read foreign articles to explain it more properly. After that, I found a research paper documenting that thermal effects from bathing increase metabolism; that's more important than beauty. Also, the water pressure effects weren't overlooked either. That's right..... The more I researched, the more I regretted that I never thought about soaking in warm water before now. Even though the feeling of soaking itself is wonderful, it felt amazing to add fragrances to clear your mind. I've never thought something like 'I'm younger than my grandchild'. And, I can't go back to how I used to bathe..... I can't do it anymore!"

"It's long, so please just tell me the gist of it."

"So..... In short, 『Ojou-sama is lovely! 』. I want to make something like this for Ojou-sama; not a bathtub that I could only call a 『bowl』."

Mentor looked smug as she took a book in her hand. I wanted to tell her, "This bathtub can fit hundreds of people inside." There was no way something that big could fit inside the mansion, no matter how big it was. *Who would enter such a bath that was designed like a temple? Nah, Mentor probably would.*

"Which world is this bath from? It's too big."

"I think this is still not enough, compared to what Ojou-sama is doing..... Well, the real one would be about this big."

She said and showed him something she'd actually drawn.

I see, if it's this then it would be about the same size as the bathhouse the servants use..... I couldn't say something like that. It looked at least two times bigger than the bathhouse.

"Are there several bathtubs because the effects of the water in each are different?"

“That’s right. I thought it would be better this way because it seems like Ojou-sama has thought of a lot of ideas for things to add to the bath, and not everyone is suited for the same things.”

“Well, you’re certainly right..... But can you make such an amazing thing for the servants? Or is this only for Ojou-sama’s use?”

“What are you saying? This is part of the research facility. The servants are only testers. This is a contribution to Ojou-sama’s experiment. It’s equipment for that..... And, I want to appeal to Master. I’m designing a nice bathtub for Ojou-sama’s use.”

No, she probably just wanted to use the bath. Definitely. Her claim was too unreasonable.

I thought, but Mentor will probably come up with a reasonable excuse for it while she waits for the master to return.

Or perhaps I should say she had probably already thought of a decent explanation and it was just buried in the pile of documents.

It was honestly unreasonable. She probably wasn’t hesitating because it held no disadvantages towards the master. Unlike me, Mentor had an annoying position, so she probably wouldn’t speak out this actively if it didn’t contain any advantages for the master..... Probably.

However, I was curious about them, since Mentor was putting so much effort into planning. *Are bathtubs that great? A specialist in water quality is raving about them so much. It’s impossible not to get interested.*

“But, what will you do about the budget? How will you collect funds for it?”

Mentor laughed when I asked something obvious.

Ah, this, I have a bad feeling about this.

“Apart from the shape of the bathroom..... To tell you the truth, I’d already given up on getting permission for improving the water-heating. It’s used for laundry; converting water into hot water easier by using the heating devices of the greenhouse. But you were assigned to Ojou-sama when I thought about asking for the development of such a device, so I postponed it..... Ronnie, I’m ordering you in the name of the head magician. Finish the development research for this device by the time the master and Ojou-sama return.”

“..... Seriously?”

“But I’ll get you to go buy some sweets before you start.”

She spoke without hesitation; yes. *It wasn’t that easy. Instead, wouldn’t it be too late to start regretting the time I use to go buy sweets. But, Mentor’s eyes weren’t laughing. Crap, she’s serious.*

“It’s also an experiment to maintain the strength of the servants. You can do it, can’t you Ronnie?”

Was yes the only answer? I can’t; I don’t have the guts to say that. Even if I think I can do it if I try.....

I wonder if she’ll make a men’s bathroom also.....?

My shoulders dropped, and a devil's hand patted it.

“Anyways, here. It's the sweets list. Go buy them.”

The Onee-samas were laughing, and they handed me the errands list instead of encouraging me..... *Yup, I know.* When I first came here I'd thought, 'They're beautiful,' but it didn't even take half a day for those thoughts to disappear. *Yup. I won't cry. I don't regret getting a job here, and if I had to choose, then I'd still choose to work here.*

..... *But, I wanted to go with Ojou-sama after all. I'll try to negotiate with her directly.*

By the way, the negotiations by Mentor were settled quite quickly when the master returned in the near future.

*Naïve, you're too naïve master. Honey and sugar aren't enough for how naïve you are. [1]*They use sweet to describe him... Like he's too soft.

But..... Well, I was one to talk since I stayed up all night finishing what Mentor assigned me because I thought it would make Ojou-sama happy.

↑1 They use sweet to describe him... Like he's too soft.

Act 11: At the Fief

It took about three and a half days to get to the fief from the Royal Capital.

Cordelia received a lecture about economics from Elvis as the carriage continued to sway.

The contents of the lecture mainly consisted of the economic situation in the Pameradia fief.

From what she'd heard from Elvis, the regional disparity that Isma had lightly touched upon before was bigger than she'd thought.

The main problem that prevented it from being solved was that the people living in the mountains and the people living in the famous wheat farms were satisfied with their current lifestyles.

"People don't seek growth if they aren't dissatisfied. If they are satisfied with their current living standards, then they won't seek to improve their lives."

"That is..... But, don't they wish to improve their villages when they see the cities?"

"They have pride. The pride the people in the mountains, have is that they can grow trees and make forests that people in the city can't. Moreover, the people living on farms take pride in the fact that they can grow more produce than people in cities. Therefore, they loathe studying, such as learning words, as it is a waste of time for them. They don't wish to learn. They think that it's fine as long as the village chief and the candidate can read. As a result, even if their agricultural research improves, no one can grasp academics or machinery. Therefore, ——— they can't improve their harvest rates."

Cordelia was at a loss for words.

(Indeed, it's difficult... to find a means to make someone think something is necessary if they judge it not to be so.)

That wasn't something that only happened now. Cordelia knew that well. It was the same for nobles who hated to stray away from tradition.

Of course, it was possible to forcibly change the way the people of the fiefs lived. But, that would cause them to be unsatisfied with their situation. Even more so for those with a lot of pride.

It would be fine if there were some advantage for them to be unsatisfied; but what did they want, ——— Cordelia couldn't come up with that straight away.

"..... How do you deal with the problem, Otou-sama?"

"I'll have to think about it sooner or later. However, I have no choice but to be confident in the results I can see now, instead of worrying over unwanted things. For example, maintaining the rivers and wells around the farms. This way also makes the people of the fief happy."

Elvis continued while looking out the window, "Countess Weltoria knows more about that. Even now, I'm still asking her to help me with that."

"Nirupama-oba-sama?"

Cordelia was surprised at the name that was suddenly spoken by Elvis.

Nirupama Weltoria was the current head of the Weltoria House, a house which had female heads for generations, and was her aunt from her mother's side of the family. Cordelia also didn't see her often because she only came to the Royal Capital when Congress was in session.

Cordelia was close enough to Weltoria for her to say, "How about becoming my adopted daughter in the future? I'll convince Elvis," while winking. Cordelia thought it was probably a joke, but if Nirupama wanted to adopt her, then that wouldn't be bad either.

She wasn't confident that she would be fit for that position, but if she were picked for that position, then she would like to live up to expectations. And..... it was also the path furthest away from the worse scenario, so she was killing two birds with one stone. However, neither Nirupama nor Elvis would agree if they judged that she didn't have the qualifications for such a position.

Her thoughts strayed from the topic at hand. *That doesn't matter right now, the fief does.*

"This is the first time that I've heard about Oba-sama helping you."

"The Countess' fief has advanced hydroponic technology. Therefore, she knows a lot about flood control. The citizens live their lives day by day, so they want results that they can see, rather than have expectations for the future. Other things can be thought about someday in the future, so it's not easy to get them to understand."

Cordelia suddenly realised something when she looked at Elvis's side profile.

(Otou-sama also doesn't plan on leaving things the way they are..... but, things aren't going smoothly.)

He did his best with state politics while managing the fief. That was too much for one person to do.

(..... I have to become Otou-sama's strength.)

She only had her own research to worry about, unlike her older brothers and sister who were already adults and had their own roles. She had more time than anyone else. There were things she couldn't do because of her age, but there must be something she could do since she had free time.

Cordelia was extremely eager to find hints of what she could do for him during the inspection.

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The primary residence of the Pameradia House was a lot bigger than their mansion in the Royal Capital. It was a white mansion with a flower garden and a variety of large trees. Also, the number of people who came to greet their returning master, while bowing, was also different.

A man around the same age as Elvis stood at the end of the line, in front of the mansion.

He took a deep bow as soon as he saw Elvis.

"Welcome back, Elvis-sama. And it is nice to meet you, Cordelia-sama. My name is Zeke Gargotta, and I have been entrusted with the administration of the fief by Elvis-sama."

“Stop with the formal greetings, Zeke.”

Cordelia guessed from the way that Elvis was speaking that he was as close to (?) Zeke as he was with Marquis Flantheim.

“I’m Cordelia Enna Pameradia.”

Cordelia took a deep bow next to her father.

“Zeke was my subordinate when I was a knight. He’s the acting lord when I’m not here.”

“Even if you say I’m the acting lord, it’s not like..... I’m the head. I only do what the Earl has ordered me to do. I wasn’t left out on the streets thanks to him, and my daughter also doesn’t worry me.”

Zeke, who seemed a little playful, stated his own title, “I am knighted.”

The title 『Knight』 only lasted for a lifetime.

In other words, he wasn’t originally a noble. However, he was given the honour of knighthood by the royal family because he’d made some kind of achievement. *His achievements probably have something to do with that left leg of his.* He had a cane in his left hand and was hiding his left leg. He probably had a 『honour-wound』 just like Elvis.

Knights got pensions when they retired, but they didn’t receive fiefs. In other words, they had to find their next place of employment. Cordelia guessed that that was when Elvis asked Zeke to work for him.

“Lunch is ready. Will I also be having lunch with you as usual?”

“Yeah. I don’t mind..... Come to think of it, where’s Aisha?”

“She’s reading picture books to the children in town, like usual. I think she’ll be back soon.”

“I even told her to come back before the master returns,” he smiled wryly; he had probably guessed that she wouldn’t make it back in time.

At that moment...

“Oh, looks like she’s just returned.”

Cordelia turned around to look at where Zeke was staring.

A pretty girl with chestnut hair and amber eyes was standing at the gate.

“You’re late, Aisha.”

“I, I’m sorry.....”

The girl looked down in shame as she trotted up to Zeke and immediately apologised to Elvis. However, Elvis didn’t seem to care.

“Let’s have lunch before it gets cold.”

Elvis spoke as he quickly entered the house. It didn’t look like he was angry; he was just saying it like he usually would.

Cordelia was late in following Elvis, so she looked up at Aisha and bowed.

“It’s nice to meet you, my name is Cordelia. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

Cordelia said that and Aisha blabbed, “Woah..... How cute.”

Then, she quickly spoke as if she had been startled, “My name is Aisha Gargotta. I am in charge of showing you around during your stay here.”

Cordelia listened to her and observed her from the front.

Aisha had big, round eyes and white skin. Cordelia thought she looked like a doll, and a question popped into her head.

“Aisha-sama.”

“You can call me Aisha, Cordelia-sama.”

“Say..... Can I call you Aisha-oneesama?”

Cordelia had an older sister, but her sister had married early, so they didn’t talk much. Therefore, she couldn’t help but speak her wish aloud to Aisha, who was probably around 15.

Aisha’s eyes widened in surprise.

“I, I don’t mind but..... Cordelia-sama has a wonderful Onee-sama, don’t you?”

“But I want to call you Onee-sama while I’m here, Aisha-sama. I’m still inexperienced, so I want Onee-sama to teach me various things... or so I think.”

Aisha’s face turned red as Cordelia said that.

“I don’t know if it’s alright for you to say something like that to me, but I don’t think there would be any problems if Cordelia-sama were to call me so.”

“Then, please take care of me Onee-sama.”

“..... I’m nervous.”

Aisha laughed a little shyly and prompted, “Well, let’s go. The food’s going to get cold.” Cordelia felt that she was like an older sister.

The main dish for lunch was Hollow Bird, which could be said to be a speciality product of the fief. The vegetables were also fresh. She couldn’t tell if they were actually more delicious than the ones from the Royal Capital, or if they just tasted so because she was tired. *But, I will know which is correct soon enough, I am staying here for a week after all.* She thought that as she looked forward to the next meal.

Elvis confined himself in his office in the afternoon, and Cordelia and Aisha were in a room in the mansion..... the room that Cordelia would be staying in.

Cordelia asked Aisha various questions as they enjoyed their after-meal tea.

“Which areas of the fief can you go to, Onee-sama?”

"I spend most of my time in this town, but sometimes I visit Caina Village to the north, which is also known as 『Wheat Village』, as father's envoy. The wheat produced there is the best in the kingdom and also gets presented to the royal family. Well, I'm actually the Earl's envoy on paper and not father's."

Aisha easily answered and Cordelia continued to question her. She hadn't heard of Caina Village, but she concluded that it was the name of one of the villages that Elvis had mentioned before.

"Do people from Caina Village also visit this town?"

"They do. They come here to deliver goods. There are those who also bring their children with them so I can read picture books to those children."

"I was late today because of that," Aisha who had said that a little funnily didn't look like she regretted it one bit. She seemed to be really good at looking after people. Aisha continued.

"I love books. So it's fun to read books to the children. I really wish they could read it by themselves though....."

"Is it hard for them to read?"

"They're smart. They would be able to learn how to read pretty quickly if we had time, but time is a bit....."

Aisha cast her eyes down as she said that. *This is probably the same thing that Otou-sama said inside the carriage.*

"They think it's fine as long as someone else can read it for them, isn't that right?"

"Frankly, yes. It's difficult and sad. But, if it is said that that is our value, then I have nothing further to say."

The aura around them got heavy as Aisha said that.

Cordelia looked around to change the subject. Then she suddenly recalled something that she couldn't do in the Royal Capital, —— the important thing which she had come all the way here for.

"Onee-sama, would you show me around town?"

"Huh? Sure."

"Yay. I rarely go outside in the Royal Capital, so I'm looking forward to it."

Otou-sama did say that we were inspecting the fief and Onee-sama said she'll show me around.

So, I could probably leave the mansion. Onee-sama accepted my request just like I thought she would.

"What would you like to see, Cordelia-sama?"

"I also want to buy a gift for my friends..... But above all, I want to see how the people live."

"Then, let's go to the market first. It'll be fine; no one here would harm someone from the Pameradia House."

As Aisha said that, she looked happy, completely different from her gloomy appearance before. Cordelia tilted her head and asked, “Why’s that?”

Aisha smiled and said.

“The Earl House is much more popular here than the royal family, so you wouldn’t be able to stay here if you hurt the Earl House. Elvis-sama was very popular when he was younger. The people of the fief are conflicted between wanting him to stay here more, and wanting him to be more active in the Royal Castle. It’s impossible to split him into two after all.”

Cordelia’s eyes widened in surprise at Aisha’s joke.

“I’m a bit surprised.”

“Now then, Cordelia-sama. Would you like to go into town now?”

“We can go now?”

“Yes. It should be fine.”

Cordelia could go out in what she was dressed in since she was wearing clothes for travelling.

Aisha had just come back from town, so she was ready to go. The two left the mansion at once.

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Aisha walked around while talking as if she was used to it, and walked down a back alleyway as if it was a garden. “It’s a shortcut,” she said and walked as if she was a kitten.

“Do you have any food you don’t like, Cordelia-sama?”

“Food? Nope, not particularly.”

“Then, let’s eat first.”

However, Aisha concluded that it wouldn’t be good to walk and eat, and guided Cordelia to the eat-in corner of the shop closest to the market.

There was a queue for the shop, but the queue opened up as soon as they saw Cordelia and they reached the front in no time at all.

“It’s the Pameradia House’s Ojou-sama.”

“It’s the second Ojou-sama who stays at the Royal Capital. She’s absolutely beautiful.”

Cordelia heard things like that and felt a little embarrassed. She knew that she was beautiful, but that was the first time she’d heard it from other people. It was slightly embarrassing. However, she couldn’t show that she was.

(I will appear in much bigger stages in the future. This is only the beginning if I compare it to how balls are.....)

She motivated herself and finally noticed.

The queue had opened up so naturally, and she was guided to a seat just like that. *Was this really alright? Does it look like I'm abusing my power?* She wasn't opposed to queuing up.

She consulted with Aisha who replied while smiling, "It's fine. This is everyone's kindness. They probably can't enjoy their meals if they make the Ojou-sama of their lord wait. So, the correct decision would be to eat first."

Aisha was like a teacher teaching mannerism.

She had also used that time to order their food.

And what arrived at their table was a delicious, freshly baked and slightly burnt scone, jam and tea.

"Oh my, this looks delicious."

Cordelia thought that she wouldn't be able to eat much since she'd just had lunch, but those thoughts were blown away as soon as she inhaled the aroma. 'I'm prepared!' she felt as if her stomach was saying that.

"These scones are made with flour from Caina Village, which I talked about before."

"It really does look delicious."

"Then, let's eat."

Cordelia wasn't good at eating scones, but she was surprised that the scone crumbled so easily when she put it into her mouth.

So this is the kingdom's best wheat?

"It's really..... delicious."

"The wheat in Caina Village is purchased by the kingdom at a fixed amount. Also, the Pameradia House also purchases a considerable amount and uses it for foreign trade. I don't want to think about it much, but we'd be in trouble in times of emergency if everything were purchased at once."

Aisha said that as she spread jam onto the scone and Cordelia chimed in with a remark.

"But..... There's also a problem with the wholesale method. If the wheat is purchased directly at a reasonable price like this shop does, then it wouldn't be a problem. But, the villagers aren't good with calculations, so there's a bunch of people who purchase it at low prices because the villages can't read."

Aisha stopped moving her hands for a second.

"Some villagers can calculate, but they aren't good with multiplication. Even if it looks as if they've sold a lot of wheat and got a lot of money for it, there are cases where they're actually selling their wheat for cheaper than they should."

"Is that..... true?"

"Yes, I noticed that while acting as an envoy. But, I can't say anything once they've accepted a deal..... I can't even convince them that it's the incorrect price in the first place."

Aisha said that a little sadly. She seemed really concerned about Caina Village.

“It’s hard to memorise letters and make calculations. But, I think that education is important so that the villages don’t get deceived by malicious people.”

Ah, so that’s why Aisha reads to the kids.

Cordelia concluded. Aisha was good at taking care of others, but she reads to the kids so that they would get interested in words. She probably wouldn’t make further progress because she’d been impatient. It took a lot of power to get things done. It wasn’t her own power, but Cordelia had a powerful backer.

“..... These scones are really delicious, aren’t they?”

“Huh? Oh, yes they are.”

“Good produce needs to have a fixed price.”

It might be possible if they could — discern what was needed. Or so Cordelia thought.

“Aisha-oneesama. I also want to think about this problem. I’m sure this doesn’t just apply to Caina Village; other villages also face the same problem..... I also want to improve the literacy rate of the people living in the fief, so that everyone could communicate their intentions. To tell you the truth, I heard about this from Otou-sama as well. He told me that the harvest would probably increase if the villagers could read. I can’t say that his intentions are the same, but you both want the same thing.”

It’s not about being able to do it or not, I’ll do it.

Cordelia looked straight at Aisha with determined eyes.

Aisha took a deep breath.

“Please let me know if I can help you with anything. I might have little influence, but I really do want to help.”

“Yes. I’m so glad that you’re here, Onee-sama. If I were eating this by myself, then I would have just finished the meal with, 『This was a delicious scone』.”

Cordelia joked a little, and they both laughed at the same time.

They looked around the bazaar a little after leaving the shop.

Everyone at the bazaar instantly knew that she was a lady of the Pameradia House and would all call out to her. “We’ll make it cheap,” they would say as they recommended her some precious metals with jewels in them, but Aisha, as her guardian, shut them down by saying, “Ojou-sama has quite a lot of jewellery, and she’s currently too young to wear too much jewellery.”

Instead, Cordelia was interested in a nice textured paper knife. It was made from Talen, a speciality wood from the fief. The wood was used to produce high-quality furniture.

“Ojou-sama, are you interested in the paper knives?”

“Yes, I am.”

The shopkeeper talked to her, and she replied with a reserved smile.

Then the shopkeeper pitched happily.

“Ojou-sama, you have your eye on an excellent item. This paper knife doesn’t lose to metal in its sharpness, and it’s nice to the touch. Please hold it. It’s light, and it’s hard to chip. I recommend this gem.”

He said, and she stretched her hand out to hold the paper knife. She was surprised at how nice it felt.

“You can engrave things onto it, so it’s a nice souvenir.”

“Then..... Can I have two of these? And how many letters can you fit on here?”

“How many letters? I can write a short sentence on it if the sentence isn’t too long.”

“Then, please write 『Thank you for everything Gille-sama』 on one of them. Is that too long?”

Cordelia felt that a paper knife was the best souvenir for someone who she always exchanged letters with. Unfortunately, the advice that her father had given her didn’t give her any hints straight away, but she didn’t feel like she was at a loss at what to get them when she saw the paper knife.

“Is this Gille-sama your Knight-sama, Ojou-sama?”

“Huh? W-we don’t have that kind of relationship.....”

“Haha, how nice. I’ll engrave it for you. I’ll carve it very carefully.”

The shopkeeper’s words surprised Cordelia a little, but the precise words that he’d engraved on the knife didn’t suit the appearance of the cheerful shopkeeper who liked to crack jokes.

She held in her hand and couldn’t help but say, “Pretty.”

“What should I do with the other knife?”

“Let’s see..... Could you engrave 『Cordelia』 onto the knife?”

“Understood. I’m more motivated to engrave Ojou-sama’s name!”

The shopkeeper began engraving once again.

(I can’t imagine Vernoux-sama writing a letter, so I’d better get him something else.)

I may be biased, but sweets would probably suit him better, —— she’s thought, but she decided to purchase a wooden mug, which looked nice to drink from, for him.

When she thought over it carefully, it took 3 and a half days to go home, and it was dangerous to bring back food when she didn’t know when she’d see him again. She only brought dried candies to bring back home.

Cordelia carried three paper bags with her as her eyes wandered to different things:

A child pulling his parent’s hands while eating fried sweets from a stall; a housewife buying process meat for dinner and adults who were acting suspiciously.

Cordelia looked at the bustling bazaar and got restless. This was the first crowd of people she'd meet in this world.

"Cordelia-sama, let's head home soon. The sun hasn't set yet, but it'll go down quickly once it starts."

"Oh, yes. You're right."

"Fufu, it's fine. We'll come here again."

Aisha understood that she still wanted to be here.

Cordelia began heading towards the mansion while feeling a little embarrassed. At that time, she heard children speaking.

"Hey, I'm so excited to see if there's wheat here like Caina Village."

"But, the village's wheat can make delicious bread. Wheat is great after all. And the Otou-sans who make the wheat are even more amazing."

Yes, she heard the voices of boys and girls thought to be from Caina Village. Cordelia cast her eyes down.

(This might be my first victory or defeat.)

She thought and looked straight ahead.

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Cordelia visited Elvis's study after dinner that day. She wanted to talk to him about something.

She wanted to ask him about the state of the fief.

Even though he had taught her a little about the problems of the fief, she wasn't able to grasp the current situation. *Couldn't we create an environment in which they could learn how to read and write? If that's possible, then couldn't they build a school?*

She thought that she would be able to find a hint for those questions by talking to Elvis.

"Otou-sama, it's Cordelia."

Cordelia knocked on the door and informed. The door opened from the inside.

It was Zeke who had opened the door.

Zeke seemed a little surprised to see Cordelia, but he soon smiled.

"Elvis-sama. I will take my leave. Please call me at any time."

"Ok."

Zeke being here meant that they were still working. She had thought that they had already finished working since they weren't in the office..... Cordelia felt a little bad.

“Is something wrong?”

“No..... I wanted to talk to Otou-sama for a little bit.....”

It was probably natural to think that Elvis would still be working even at a time like this. Elvis spent most of his time at the Royal Capital and would have a pile of work waiting for him every time he returned to the fief, even if Zeke was acting as the fief lord.

Elvis, however, didn't stop writing and said, “You can sit on the chair over there,” as he pointed to a chair by the window.

“I heard that you went into town with Aisha.”

“Yes. She showed me around. Ertiga is a very lively and good town. Everyone seemed cheerful and proud.”

“It's not just Ertiga. Go to the nearby towns and villages with Aisha. She's probably very familiar with these places. I will arrange your escort and carriage.”

Cordelia was surprised by Elvis's words. She was given permission so easily here, unlike when they were at the Royal Capital. Of course, visiting the fief was the purpose of the inspection, so receiving permission to go around might be obvious. However, in the end, she was only going as 『Father's Attendant』. Although Aisha was coming with her as a fellow attendant, she couldn't just wander off.

Also..... She had doubted her ears for a second when she heard the word 『escort』.

Isma was a knight and also a regular of the national armed forces, but when she went out with him, it was more like 『an outing with Onii-sama』 instead of 『being escorted by a soldier』. Therefore, she was a little perplexed at having an escort purposely allocated to her. But it was the Pameradia fief so it wouldn't be strange for them to have a private army. No, it wasn't possible to defend the fief if they didn't have one. And, she once again realised that she was in a position where it was possible for her to be escorted by soldiers.

I'm just like a princess. No, I might actually be one here.

“Do you have any plans to travel around the fief, Otou-sama?”

“I do. It's a bit far from here, but I'm going to inspect the construction site at Mir's River tomorrow. I also plan to head to the nearby village.”

“Could I come along with you? I want to go to the village near Ertiga but..... I also want to see Otou-sama work.”

It was impossible for her to watch Elvis work in the Royal Capital. She felt that the existence of the Pameradia House was a little special just from her little outing today.

Therefore, she wanted to see Elvis doing that kind of work up close. If he said that she would be a hindrance, then she would have no choice but to give up. If she was asked, “What would you understand if you see me work?” then she might not have an answer. However, she thought that she might find an answer to Elvis's 『What is a noble?』 in this place.

Elvis looked up from his documents and stared at Cordelia in silence.

“There is a condition.”

“Yes?”

“Understand this before we depart. If you don’t, then it would be meaningless for you to come along. I will change the departure date to the day after tomorrow.”

Then, Elvis held out a document related to riparian works. The top document had an outline of the current condition, aim and state of progress. Then, she discovered the Caina Village was in the vicinity of the riparian area. The document had about 30 pages, and Cordelia concluded that the details were written in those pages.

“You can ask Zeke about things you don’t understand. He knows a lot about this.”

“Okay.”

The documents looked extremely difficult to understand with its small letters, but she was glad that she was given them.

It was a document that a child wouldn’t understand, but Elvis had only said, “Understand this,” to her. Therefore, she could only respond to his expectations, because that was something she could do now.

“..... Is that all?”

“Huh?”

“Was that all you wanted?”

Cordelia was a little surprised by Elvis’s words.

Because she felt like he was asking if this was the only thing she could do now.

Cordelia couldn’t answer immediately.

She did have something she wanted to say.

She wanted to do something about the villages.

However, she hadn’t found a way to help them. She couldn’t consult him about this matter with such vague words like wanting to do something.

Elvis didn’t urge her to answer.

However, he waited for an answer and didn’t return his eyes to his documents.

Cordelia thought desperately for an answer and finally opened her mouth.

“There is something, I want to accomplish. But, I still haven’t found a way to accomplish it. Will you listen to what I have to say once I’ve found the answer?”

“Are you planning to talk about something foolish that I would refuse to listen to you before you even start?”

It was a roundabout way of speaking, but he had certainly acknowledged her.

After a while, Zeke said he wanted to serve tea and pushed the cart. Then, they talked about how he would often brew tea when he was a knight.

Elvis would occasionally reply without changing his expression, unlike the time when he was with Marquis Flantheim.

.... Otou-sama, even half is fine, so please use the same kind of attitude on Marquis Flantheim. Cordelia couldn't help but think that. But, that was probably how much he trusted Zeke, so much so that he entrusted Zeke with the role of acting lord. So it might be a matter of fact to say that it was natural.

After they'd finished their tea and Zeke had finished talking about the fads and popular items in Ertiga, Elvis ordered Cordelia to return to her room. At the same time, Zeke also left the room to take away the tea utensils.

Then, Zeke laughed a little in the corridor.

"The Cap..... Master was in an excellent mood, wasn't he?"

"Was he?"

"Yes. He's probably tired, and he'll probably overwork himself at this rate, so I'll have to keep an eye on him."

Cordelia smiled wryly at Zeke who was making fun of Elvis.

Elvis didn't seem any different to her, but she was glad if he was in a good mood.

Zeke continued happily.

"Master has instructed me to act as the lord. But if I was to put it in another way, then I can't do anything without Master's orders. In short, Master is always tired because he orders me around."

Zeke said that, but it wasn't easy to carry out the orders he'd been given. Responsibility is heavy and unexpected events occur. Because he has such a heavy duty, he shouldn't say something like that so easily, even if he is humble, Cordelia thought.

She thought so..... but she didn't say it out loud. It would sound too brazen.

Zeke wasn't saying meaningless things after all. He definitely knew Elvis a lot better than Cordelia did.

But she once again realised how much work Elvis did because of Zeke's words.

Elvis rarely used time for himself. He spends little time at home, but he would use most of that time for work. It was a little worrying, even if that was the image of a noble he was seeking. He worked so much that it wouldn't be a surprise if his body collapsed.

"..... I wonder why Otou-sama works so hard."

Those words weren't a question, they were words that had just slipped out of her mouth.

However, Zeke replied to those words.

“Probably because of his beliefs. I heard he had a lot of hardships when he was younger because he had no power. Captain’s favourite saying is, 『Your dreams won’t come true if you don’t have power』.”

Oh, so Otou-sama wanted power. She recalled the 『I love Otou-sama incident』 from when she was younger.

She didn’t think too much about him wanting status or prestige when she was discourteous at that time, but she wondered if he was implying something like that, back then. Even so, she was glad that she had evaded it. She was able to listen to such talks calmly now because she had.

“Well, he has already accumulated a lot of power, so I don’t think he needs to go that far to pursue it. Instead, the status he has gained has taken away his time. He becomes completely exhausted from his duties without realising his dream. Regretfully, he’s been this clumsy since long ago.”

Zeke said that as he smiled wryly.

Cordelia parted ways with Zeke afterwards and returned to her room. She headed towards her desk and composed her plan. If she knew how she to deal with it, then she could negotiate with Elvis. Therefore, she had to figure something out.

(Even if I borrow his influence, I need the blueprints for the rental fee.)

For the time being, her objective was to establish a school.

A learning place where children would be taught how to calculate and read and write. She wanted to make something like that.

She was hoping that Elvis would make investments to the various expenses that would incur. Therefore, she had to make draw up a plan for the investments.

“I can vision earning income from it in the future. But, I can’t charge money for it right now.”

She needed a plan that would convince Elvis and the people of the fief..... If she didn’t have a winning percentage, then it would be difficult for her plan to bear fruit.

“Making education free..... That’s definitely not enough. I doubt the men who have confidence in their wives would send their children to school. They’re also thought of as part of the labour force..... Ah, so difficult.”

Cordelia racked her brains over it.

The sound of the door being knocked resounded throughout the room while the clock was chiming.

“Come in,” Cordelia replied, and Aisha appeared.

“I came because I saw the light. It’s already late, Cordelia-sama.”

“Oh my, is it that late already?”

“Yes, it is. ——— So, I bought you a late-night snack.”

Aisha said as she happily held out the bread she was hiding before her and presented it to Cordelia.

Aren't you going to tell me to go to bed? Cordelia thought but didn't retort. It was impossible. The bread had a pleasant aroma.

"It's normal white bread, but it's very delicious."

"It's been lightly toasted, so it's warm." The bread that was presented to her was delicious and soft.

"It's made from a rare type of wheat, so we hardly eat it here. But, I did receive some from the children I read to."

Aisha laughed.

Cordelia observed the bread for a while and then slowly carried a piece to her mouth.

"Delicious....."

"Isn't it?"

"But, it's a little different from the bread at the Royal Capital."

"Eh?"

"It's soft and delicious, but something's different. Could it be that it just tastes soft.....? It's a bit too dry and also different from the bread we eat for lunch."

Cordelia couldn't explain it very well.

If it's just the taste, then I feel like this one's more delicious. But, I also feel like the dryness obscures the taste. Of course, this might just be a matter of preference.....

"But..... I see, if you use this wheat then ——...."

Then, Cordelia had an epiphany.

"Thank you, Aisha-oneesama. I think I see it!!"

"Huh? Yes, I'm glad?"

Cordelia decided to talk to Elvis again tomorrow.

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Next morning.

Cordelia immediately stopped Elvis as he was heading to his office after breakfast.

Elvis had said that they would be visiting the river construction tomorrow. Therefore, that was the only time she could talk to him.

"Otou-sama. There's something I want you to take a chance on."

"What is it?"

“I would like to teach the children of Caina Village to do calculations and read and write. I would like you to invest in the development of this project.”

Cordelia declared as Elvis looked straight at her.

Elvis’s eyes were sharp; his eyes were always sterner than usual whenever negotiations took place, and Cordelia had never seen him look like that before.

However, she didn’t pull back and looked straight ahead.

“You said invest, didn’t you? So that means you hope to make a profit from it.”

“I intend to make revenue from medicinal herbs in the future. During which, I would not only gain money but information as well. This information would surely be useful to Otou-sama.”

“From medicinal herbs, was it? Ronnie has reported this to me before. It seems like you’re thinking about opening up a business. Then, did you think of a concrete way to do this?”

“I would like to open a school in which all the children of the farmers will attend. It doesn’t have to be every day, once every few days is enough.”

“Do you think you can convince them since farming is their livelihood?”

“I would like to offer them bread made from the best baker in the Royal Capital in exchange for taking the children from the workforce of the village.”

“..... Bread?”

Yes, she noticed this yesterday while eating bread.

“Bread made by the best baker in the Royal Capital using the best wheat. I will offer it to the families. If I do that, then they would probably agree to the terms. I heard that everyone in Caina Village bakes their own bread. I don’t think there is much difference between baking bread and sending the children to study for a short time, —— in that case, I don’t think it would make much of a difference.”

Also, if she could convince them to eat the bread and cooperate with her to make the best bread, —— if she aimed to do this, then she thought that they would probably work with her.

“Why do you want to teach them such things?”

“For letters..... First, they could read contracts and books. They need contracts when trading wheat, don’t they? And if they read books, they could adopt farming methods from other regions. There’s no need to actually adopt those methods, but knowledge is important. They might find what they’re looking for by reading books.”

“You also want them to be able to adjust the price in case someone tries to cheat them, isn’t that right?”

“Yes.”

Elvis, who had his eyes cast down, looked straight back at her.

“I can see how there will be some opposition, but the details can probably be settled through negotiations. However, there is one problem.”

“Which is?”

“You are still a child.”

Cordelia gasped at those words.

“The concept isn’t bad. But, you’re not old enough to step onto the negotiation table.”

She was vaguely aware that people might think she was just messing around because she looked young.

“How about this proposal? If I negotiate directly with the head chief, then we can implement this much faster. But then, it won’t be your achievement anymore.”

Cordelia met Elvis’s eyes.

And she couldn’t ask for better than his proposal.

“I don’t need the credit.”

“Is that so? However, I also don’t want the achievements of a child. Don’t throw away your achievements so easily..... I will invest in it. However, I will tell the villagers the truth after you’ve paid me back in full. How does that sound?”

“Eh, mm, I..... Good.”

“Then, it’s decided. I’ll think about the construction of the school, and it’s probably better to open it after harvest season is over. You have until then to find a teacher amongst the villagers. But, what will you do about the baker?”

“That’s.....”

Things were moving too abruptly, and Cordelia was doing her best to keep up with the conversation.

Everything was still just an idea, and she was going to think more about it after it’d been accepted.

“..... There’s an apprentice who works in the kitchen at our mansion in the Royal Capital who’s aiming to be a baker.”

“Huh?”

“He’s a contest winner, even though the contest wasn’t that big. He’ll probably become the best baker in the Royal Capital someday.”

“Otou-sama, that’s..... A scam, isn’t it?”

“It’s not a lie, now is it? The person himself said that he’ll become the best baker in the Royal Capital.”

Elvis spoke without being perturbed, and she shrugged her shoulders.

(..... Otou-sama, I thought you were getting rounder than you used to be.)

She didn’t know if that was just her imagination or something else.

But, she was glad that one of her proposals got accepted and her next goal, —— she was looking forward to finding a teacher.



Her new mission was to 『Find a Teacher』 .

It wasn't a difficult task since she had someone she could ask.

Yes, it was Aisha, the person who read to the children and wanted to teach them how to read and write.

The day after she'd accompanied them on Elvis's inspection of the river, Cordelia and Aisha went to an art museum.

They were supposed to go inspect another village, but Aisha had said, "You're finally here, so please look at something that you can only see here."

Cordelia had never been to an art museum in the Royal Capital. However, she was familiar with paintings to an extent and was taught about them.

The history of the Pameradia House was also exhibited in the corner of the museum. There was also an explanation about how they were an equestrian tribe, and how history had changed since then. Of course, they were displayed in paintings and sculptures, and the image of their magnificence was strong.

"There are a lot of pieces here with an emphasis on strength, unlike the art museums of the Royal Capital."

"Have you been to an art museum in the Royal Capital, Onee-sama?"

"Yes, I used to live in the Royal Capital. Father started working for the Earl straight after his retirement from the military. But, I didn't want to leave my friends, so I said some wilful words to him. I was staying with my grandparents until about two years ago.

"I'm made my father sad because of that," Aisha laughed impishly. "But, I don't think I'll move back there. This lifestyle suits me more."

"..... Then, there is something I would like to ask you, Onee-sama."

"Oh my? I wonder what is it ——."

Aisha replied softly while laughing next to her, but she suddenly paused and looked very grim. Cordelia was curious and followed her gaze.

Then, she saw a young man.

He looked around frantically and then froze on the spot when he found Aisha.

On the other hand, Aisha frowned and said, "Cordelia-sama, shall we leave?" before walking away.

Thereupon, the man unfroze and yelled, despite being in an art museum, "Wa-wait Aisha!" Then, he continued.

“You’re the only one I love, please, marry me!”

Aisha and Cordelia weren’t the only ones who froze at those words; everyone in the museum froze.

It was a gaudy, ardent and inappropriate confession.

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After that, Cordelia wasn’t sure how they left the art museum.

But she vaguely remembered stopping a red-faced Aisha from slapping the young man and dragging the both of them away.

(I didn’t think I would see a scene of carnage at the age of 8.....)

She thought that while sitting on the edge of a bench by the canal and peeking at the two.

She actually wanted to go home and leave the two to their discussion, but Aisha wouldn’t let go of her hand. Aisha properly felt like she was backed into a corner.

Cordelia slowly observed the young man.

He had dark-brown eyes, short hair and his mouth was set in a hard line. His face was so red that you wouldn’t think he was the same person as the one who had made a bold confession just moments ago. His eyes flickered up and down, and he looked very restless.

What the earth is going on? What should I do?



Cordelia didn't have the skills to clear the dispute. She didn't even know what their relationship was in the first place. But, one of them did propose to the other.

Even so, it would go nowhere if both of them didn't speak. *I really want both of you to hurry up and talk already.*

She wished that, and the young man finally spoke.

"I took the knight's appointment test. That's why I came here to ask for your hand in marriage. You said this a long time ago, didn't you? That you want to marry a knight. You said you wanted to marry someone strong like your father. You said it like it was your most favourite phrase."

"Those are just silly words of a child. What are you saying!? I'm sure you'll get hurt right away, Warren. I want you to quit before you get hurt!"

"But, if I don't do this then you won't take me seriously."

"Even so, you shouldn't be so rash! Even though you're so weak! How can you do something like that for me.....!"

Cordelia listened to their quarrel and really wanted to get away from there.

What's with this conversation? Did these two forget that there's a child here?

What on earth are they quarrelling about? Should I mediate between them? Or should I just stand here and act like a stone statue? Aisha stood up while Cordelia was puzzled.

"At any rate, I'm not going back to the Royal Capital ——!!"

She covered her face and ran away after saying that.

Cordelia was frozen on the spot and couldn't chase after her, but she was more worried about being left behind.

"..... Not going back to the Royal Capital?"

He said questioningly.

Aisha-oneesama had said that she couldn't leave her friends, —— so why had she come here in the first place?

And, more importantly.

"Erm..... Are you alright?"

"Ah, Aisha..... Ran away....."

The young man shedding lots of tears is quite different from the knights I know..... He's completely different from my brothers. She couldn't help but think that. What should I do? And there is the possibility that a child comforting him would dig at his wounds.

Cordelia decided to watch quietly over him until he snapped out of it because there was nothing else she could do.

It would be bad if I don't go home for dinner. It would be great if he stops crying by then, she'd thought, but luckily, the man recovered faster than she thought he would.

"Sorry, I was distracted. I'm Warren McGregor. I'm Viscount McGregor's heir. 16 years old. As you can see, I'm the guy who proposed to Aisha, but she ran away....."

The last bit was completely masochistic, but Cordelia decided to pretend that she didn't hear it and interact with him like an adult. "My name is Cordelia Enna Pameradia," she introduced herself.

Warren slipped off the bench when he heard that.

"Ah, Pa, huh? Pame?"

"It's Pameradia."

"Huuuuuuuuuuuuuhhhh? Come to think of it, that hair and those eyes..... I'm sorry!"

"No, please don't worry about it. I am a child, and you stand out too much if you speak too loudly, so please act as you normally would."

"Please sit," she told him, and Warren made himself smaller as he sat down on the seat.

He seemed to be embarrassed, but it was already too late for that since she had already seen the whole commotion.

"It's about what you two were talking about before, but did something happen to Aisha-oneesama in the Royal Capital?"

"I don't know..... She seemed a little down 3 years ago in spring, and then she suddenly left the Royal Capital two years ago."

His eyes began to tear up again as he said that.

"I've always loved her, but she suddenly became distant..... I thought about whether or not I did something dodgy..... But the only times I went out with a girl was to pick out a present for Aisha and when I consulted another girl because she was worried about love. I never even paid attention to other women....."

"In short, as far as you're concerned, you've never done anything that could have caused a misunderstanding."

"I thought it might have been about something different, so I tried my best to become a knight."

The air around them became really heavy. Warren had already hit rock bottom.

However, Cordelia thought, *it might be something else*, as she was listening to his story.

"I won't go back to the Royal Capital." Aisha had said, so Cordelia didn't think that it was something to do with her being unable to stomach Warren going shopping with other girls. And,

"From how I see things, it's not like Aisha-oneesama thinks of you in a bad light."

Cordelia spoke, and Warren suddenly raised his face, "Huh?"

Cordelia regretted it a little. She didn't want to get too deeply involved, but she couldn't just leave it as it was. She was worried about Aisha.

"I'll ask Aisha-oneesama about it indirectly. How long would you be staying here Warren-sama?"

"Erm, the morning of the day after tomorrow....."

"Please tell me where you're staying. I'll tell you about Onee-sama."

Warren was moved to tears by what Cordelia was saying. Cordelia was panicking a little inside, *I think it's okay, but what should I do if it's not?* Of course, she didn't let that show on her face.

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Warren took her home.

Even though the town was safe, it wasn't a good idea to let a noble child walk by herself in an unfamiliar street.

Cordelia returned to her room and changed her clothes while thinking; *now then, what should I do?*

When she finished getting dressed and sat down on her bed, she heard a knock at the door.

"Come in. It's Aisha-oneesama, right?"

As she'd guessed from the aura, Aisha was standing on the other side of the door.

Aisha's eyes were still red and puffy. She had probably been crying.

"I'm really sorry for being upset."

"It's fine. Warren-sama sent me home."

She was probably so worried about her own things and got even more apologetic at those words.

Cordelia moved to the sofa and urged Aisha to sit down with a "Please sit." Aisha sat down timidly.

"....."

"....."

It was good that she'd sat down, but Cordelia was at a loss over where to start. However, they would get nowhere if they just remained like that. Cordelia made up her mind and cut to the chase.

"Onee-sama, do you hate the Royal Capital?"

Aisha froze for a second and then shook her head and hands.

"No, that's out of the question. I just felt a little overwhelmed at the Royal Capital. But I love both it and this place!!"

"Then, why don't you want to be there?"

Aisha began tearing up.

Cordelia was startled and was about to ask her what was wrong.....

“My nose just keeps dripping.”

Cordelia heard Aisha say those words.

“..... Excuse me?”

“I was fine until about 3 years ago. I lived without any incidents until then. But then, my nose suddenly started running at the beginning of spring. My eyes got itchy and would water, so it got really red..... It would stay that way until summer.”

Tears started flowing down Aisha’s face.

“There are no ladies who have runny noses. Warren also, he probably doesn’t..... I’m the one who feels ashamed about this so I understand this best. So I couldn’t stay at the Royal Capital where Warren is anymore.....!”

Cordelia was dumbfounded because Aisha was talking as if the world was ending. Then, she said just one sentence.

“..... That’s hay fever, isn’t it? That.”

Those words resounded throughout the whole room.

“.....”

“.....”

“Huh?”

She decided to ask Aisha, who didn’t seem to understand very well if it rang any bells.

If she got hay fever at the Royal Capital, then it was probably triggered in certain areas. Plants in this world were like herbs and only grew in places that were suitable for them if humans didn’t cultivate them. She had the impression that the pollen and seeds of this world were drawn in by the magic of the land, rather than be swept away by the wind. Seeds and pollen didn’t fly around in areas where the magic didn’t suit them. There were exceptions, but little pollen flew around in places where the magic didn’t suit them.

Other people would show symptoms for hay fever as well if pollen flew around the whole Royal Capital. However, she had never heard anything like that before.

“Just for reference, but do you have any places that cause your symptoms to appear?”

“At my home and Warren’s house..... My symptoms don’t really appear in other places.”

“Are there any prominent trees that are more than three decades old there? For example, cedar or cypress.”

“There are cedar trees. It sounds like the ones you’re describing.”

“That’s probably it.”

Cedar trees were rare at the Royal Capital.

“Hay fever..... I’ve read about it in books. If you inhale too much pollen, then you’ll keep sneezing, and your nose gets runny.”

“That is correct.”

“Then, either way, it’s impossible..... He’s the eldest son, so he’ll continue living in that house. I can’t tell him to cut such a fine tree for me.....!”

Cordelia continued since Aisha looked like she was going to burst into tears again.

“Onnee-sama, I have a solution for that. But, it’s still in the experimental stage, and I can’t guarantee that it would be ready by spring.....”

“What is it?”

Ah, Onnee-sama loves Warren-sama after all.

Cordelia thought once again, and she felt her cheeks going red; she cleared her throat to cover that up.

“Can you keep this confidential?”

“I will!”

“I am researching medicinal herbs. My research consists of condensing the plant’s energy and using it in ways that are good for the human body. This part of my research isn’t hidden from my family.”

“You’re researching something complicated.”

“It’s a secret from here on out. Although it’s still in the pre-experimental stage, I am trying to find a way to relieve hay fever symptoms with herbal tea, in other words, medicinal tea. I am also trying to make an ointment to prevent nasal troubles. There’s also a method to cleanse the air in the room by burning aromas.”

Cordelia wrote notes down on a piece of paper that was close to her.

“But it might be a bit harsh for Onnee-sama since you don’t like the taste of elderflower nor the smell of peppermint.....”

Peppermint would serve this purpose, according to Aisha’s magic power. It could be mixed with elderflower to make herbal tea, and the fragrance itself is effective for relieving blocked noses.

Eucalyptus was also good to use as a bath salt, but she still hadn’t found any.

There were other ways to relieve her symptoms as well, but Aisha grabbed Cordelia’s hands before she could mention them.

Then, she said without hesitation while gripping Cordelia’s hands.

“It’s fine, I’ll definitely grow to like it. It’s the smell that’s going to help me!”

Cordelia was overwhelmed by how much force Aisha was using, but she thought it was lovely that Aisha was acting so desperate.

I could be of assistance, she thought and was happy.

“Then, Onee-sama. I have a request..... I would like you to do something in exchange.”

“What is it?”

“Warren-sama will be entering the dormitory as a knight apprentice. I think he would have little time off. During that time, I would like you to stay at the fief. And I want you to teach the children of Caina Village how to make calculations as well as read and write. Of course, if Warren-sama has a long break, then I would get the teacher to take a break as well. Of course, I will pay you a salary.”

Aisha’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Huh..... Mm, that is?”

“I am looking for a teacher who can teach calculations and letters to that village.”

“Gl-gladly!! Will the people of the village really accept this proposal?!”

“Otou-sama negotiated with them, but I heard that they responded positively to the idea. I don’t think negotiations would break down if we have a reliable teacher. I’m sure the villagers trust you greatly.”

Aisha broke into a smile at Cordelia’s reply.

“If that’s the case, then I’ll gladly accept!”

“..... Onee-sama, aren’t you happier than about the countermeasures for hay fever?”

“Because everyone, everyone..... They weren’t interested at all.....”

Aisha was honestly happy, and Cordelia wasn’t sure if she were glad she’d asked.

(Because Warren-sama seems like he’ll get lonely seeing how zealous she is at being a teacher.....)

No, that’s not it. She looked just as happy at both pieces of information, Cordelia adjusted her thoughts and told Aisha what she had to say.

“Onee-sama, Warren-sama is staying on the second floor of the tavern on Second Street. How about visiting him tomorrow morning?”

“Cordelia-sama..... Thank you very much!”

“No, I didn’t do anything.”

“I’ll visit him right away!”

Cordelia was surprised at how energetic Aisha was.

“Mm, erm, Onee-sama! It’s already dark outside!”

“But, I want to tell Warren about these things right away..... And, I have to apologise to him. I’ll have him send me home, so I’ll be fine!”

Cordelia was surprised at how assertive Aisha was as she vanished with a, “I’ll be back!”

She didn’t even have the time to say, “But the way there is also dangerous.....”

(But, I’m sure Warren-sama would love her even if her nose were constantly dripping..... But as a girl, of course, she would hate it.)

She also thought that there would probably be a demand for countermeasures against allergic ailments such as hay fever from now on. She’d never thought that elderflower would become useful.

“But, love between childhood friends, huh..... How nice. It’s like a tale.”

If it were a childhood friend, then that would apply to Vernoux, but she didn’t see him in that way. He probably didn’t see Cordelia in that light either. In fact, he had told her that she was like a boy.

The other boy she knew that was around the same age as her was Gille ——.

“Woah, what am I thinking! Right, I’m going to become a beauty in the future and find a lovely man at the evening parties!”

Cordelia rolled on her bed as she made that resolution.

I will definitely get married in the future.

Before that, I’ll complete the medicine for hay fever.

When I get back to the Royal Capital, I’ll ask Ronnie to make eye drops with the same consistency as tears.

“Come to think of it, I forgot to give the presents to the servants here.”

Cordelia took deep breaths to calm herself down as she remembered the calendula cream that laid in her bag.

She continued doing so until Aisha came back home with Warren.

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Cordelia found out that Aisha had returned when she was heading to the dining room for dinner. She heard the sound of the front door opening and saw that Aisha had returned.

Aisha looked very lively.

“Welcome home, Onee-sama.”

Cordelia said, but Aisha didn’t hear her. *Could it be because I’m far away?* She thought, but Aisha was looking around restlessly and was looking in the opposite direction. She didn’t seem to have noticed that Cordelia had spoken to her.

(I wonder what she’s looking for.)

Cordelia looked in the direction that Aisha was looking in and finally realised. Warren's shadow could be seen behind Aisha. *He probably walked her home.* He noticed that Cordelia was there before Aisha had. He met Cordelia's eyes and laughed bashfully. In short, it was like that. Cordelia returned his smile, and Aisha said in surprised, "Oh!"

The two looked in the same direction as Aisha in surprise and saw Zeke.

Zeke was surprised at Aisha's tone and the fact that she was running towards him. But the thing that made his eyes google in surprise was what Aisha blurred out.

"Otou-sama! I am getting engaged!"

It was a wonderful and grand proclamation.

Zeke, who had heard that proclamation, froze and looked as if he was staggering.

Cordelia panicked for a second.

However, Zeke didn't fall to the ground, since he had struck the floor with his cane, with a loud thump, to keep his balance. But, he was facing the ground so they couldn't see his expression.

Cordelia concluded that it wouldn't be odd for Zeke to faint in that situation. After all, Aisha was talking about getting engaged. It was something that even Cordelia, who had lit the flame, couldn't have predicted. Warren was also frozen on the spot, so Aisha's words had come as a surprise to him too.

(..... *This is awkward for the future father-in-law.*)

She was sure that Warren would be yelled at considerably in this situation.

Cordelia pitied Warren a little, but relaxed when she saw how happy Aisha was. In the first place, they couldn't say anything because Aisha's mood was influencing the aura of the room.

But, a single sentence from Elvis progressed the situation.

"..... What are you doing?"

Elvis was probably heading to the dining room and raised his eyebrow when he saw the people gathered in the entrance. It wasn't like he was finding fault in them for doing so, he just didn't understand the situation.

However, Warren had probably never met Elvis before, and his attitude changed completely. He began panicking and turned red. Warren had never thought that the remarks of his engagement would come out in front of Earl Pameradia.

(*I should do something about this.*)

But a low voice sounded before Cordelia could say anything.

It was Zeke.

"Elvis-sama, I am sorry the disturbance."

"I don't mind. This isn't the place for you to talk in."

“You are correct. Then, Elvis-sama, I have a request. Would you mind if I invite that person over there, Warren McGregor, for dinner? The fact that he is here indicates that he hasn’t thought about what to do for dinner at all.”

“..... It’s fine. Is he your acquaintance?”

“Yes. But right now he is a good for nothing, detestable person in my eyes. I would like to beat him up with all I have but..... Apparently, he’s going to be my daughter’s husband.”

Elvis blinked several times. However, he didn’t show any other reaction.

“If it were up to you, then Aisha would remain single forever.”

Elvis said something very joke-like and turned his back to Zeke. He was heading towards the dining room. Zeke, who was left behind, shrugged his shoulders.

However, when Elvis’s back was out of sight, the aura around Zeke changed, and he threw a sharp look at Warren.³

“McGregor’s brat. As you know, Elvis-sama is a famous swordsman. I’m sure you know his reputation as a knight well.”

“I, I do.”

“I know you’re going to be a knight. If you become a knight like Elvis-sama, then you could probably defeat me..... You better prepare yourself if you want to become Aisha’s husband.”

Zeke spoke in a harsh tone, but he was laughing.

He seemed to have understood.

(..... He is the one who knows Onee-sama best. I’m sure he knows.)

He did seem a little lonely but also relieved at the same time. Cordelia was relieved to see that.

“Everyone, the food will get cold soon. So shall we head to dinner?”

And each of the three smiled differently in response.

The dining room was calm.

Of course, Warren was extremely nervous from start to finish because his big sempais as knights, his father-in-law and Earl Pameradia, were seated there. However, Cordelia thought it was charming how Aisha was desperately trying to dispel his nervousness. Also, Zeke would preach some of his knowledge as a knight and would occasionally make fun of Warren. The aura in the dining room wasn’t stiff at all.

Even though Elvis remained silent most of the time, it wasn’t an uncomfortable silence. Although, his silence seemed intimidating and Warren cowered a little.

All conversation seized for a while as they ate their dessert. Cordelia used the opportunity to ask Aisha something that she was secretly anxious about and, although it wasn’t something that would make things awkward, it did make everyone pause for a bit.

“Onee-sama. You said you got engaged a while ago..... But how did he propose to you?”

She could imagine that Aisha had conveyed her affections to Warren. But, at any rate, he did get dumped once before. However, she couldn't believe that Warren would propose to her just because Aisha had told him she loved him. Warren had made a passionate proposal in public. Since they both love each other, it wouldn't be odd for him to make another passionate proposal. Of course, it was possible that he'd proposal to her as soon as he found out she loved him..... At any rate, Cordelia was genuinely interested in how it happened.

Cordelia intended to say that quietly, but her voice resounded throughout the dining room louder than she'd imagined.

All the men stared at Aisha.

Aisha's eyes widened in surprise and then she smiled.

“That's, you know.....”

“Ah, Aisha! That's.....”

“It's a secret.”

Aisha interrupted Warren as he panicked.

“So it's a secret?”

“Yes. Because they're words that Warren said just for me, you know?”

Aisha seemed very happy, and Cordelia felt as if she looked a little glowing.

At the same time she thought, *would I be able to meet that person one day?*

But, it was only a flickering thought.

“What did you say to Aisha, Brat?”

Zeke sounded as if he was crawling on the ground and Cordelia and Aisha looked at each other and laughed.

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Cordelia finally handed out the Calendula cream that she'd forgotten about to the servants after dinner.

She had asked the maids, who were taking care of her, to give it out and didn't do it herself. She actually wanted to distribute them herself, but there were just too many people. However, she was satisfied with seeing the surprised faces of the maids whom she did give them to.

She wanted to hear about the results of the cream face-to-face similar to now when she came here again.

(Or I could just write a letter to Aisha-oneesama and ask her about it. I also want to ask her about the classes too.)

She thought as she headed to where Elvis was.

His workload had decreased dramatically since it was nearly time for us to leave the fief. Zeke did say that he had more spare time during this period. So Otou-sama should have the same free time, —— she thought that as she visited Elvis's room.

However, Elvis was still working.

(..... Otou-sama might be bad at taking breaks.)

Of course, I understand that he's busy. But this isn't good. It really isn't.

In this situation, I want him to know the joys of taking breaks as soon as possible.

Therefore, she recomposed herself and asked him.

"Otou-sama, may I have a moment of your time?"

"..... I don't mind."

"Then, it'll be ready soon, so won't you accompany me?"

"What are you trying to do," Elvis's eyes seem to say.

Cordelia answered with a grin.

"I have kept you waiting, but I would like you to try this fatigue recovery method."

She showed Elvis a small bottle of essential oil.

Elvis concluded that the bottle was something Cordelia was researching. He sat down on the sofa without saying anything and waited for Cordelia to finish her preparations.

Although, Cordelia was pretty much finished. All she needed was a towel, hot water and the essential oils; just those three things. The pail was being brought by the maid standing outside the door.

First, Cordelia dropped a drop of lavender oil into the pail. A gentle scent drifted about the room. Then, she dipped the towel into the pail and lightly squeezed the water out. The warm water felt pleasant to the touch.

This was probably Elvis's first time smelling this aroma.

"Did you make this fragrance?"

His short sentence was filled with surprise.

Cordelia smiled in response.

"Otou-sama, please put your back to the sofa. Then close your eyes, face the ceiling and take it slowly."

Elvis's didn't say a word as he closed his eyes and put his back to the sofa.

Cordelia put the towel over Elvis's closed eyes.

“Warm towels can help with eye strain. It is important to take good care of your eyes.”

“.....”

Cordelia concluded that it must have felt good because Elvis didn't reply. She could see the tension in his face going away at the parts that weren't covered by the towel. This was the combined effects of the warmth around the eyes and the lavender aroma.

Cordelia felt that he was able to relax.

“..... Aisha.....”

“Yes?”

“Aisha said that it was thanks to you that she could return to the Royal Capital.”

Elvis said abruptly.

He didn't talk about the treatment he was receiving, and Cordelia smiled wryly at the subject.

“I'm happy that I could be of help to Aisha-sama's problems. However, I wouldn't have been able to get the truth out of her had Warren-sama not come. I think that it's thanks to him that this could happen.”

In fact, Aisha's feelings wouldn't have been drawn out that much if it wasn't Warren who had gone that far to show her his own feelings.

But, Elvis continued without mentioning Warren.

“Herbal tea and essential oils, was it? I'm still not sure if it would be effective for Aisha, but you come up with terrific ideas one after the other, don't you?”

“It is thanks to Otou-sama for giving me the environment. Thank you very much, Otou-sama.”

“..... Be a little more confident.”

“Excuse me?”

“Being too humble isn't a virtue. Success rates decrease if you don't have confidence. This isn't just about Aisha. The servants at the Royal Capital are probably happy as well. There are some servants in this mansion that thanked me because they were under the conception that I'd given them the present.”

With that, Cordelia knew that the other servants, the ones whom she hadn't passed the presents onto herself, were also happy. Otherwise, Elvis wouldn't have known about it.

But, Cordelia was hesitant to proclaim this. She couldn't express it very well, but this wasn't her being humble.

“Or..... Are you saying that because you think you can still do more?”

“I think that's, the case.....”

Cordelia understood from Elvis's words.

Is that so? I've just started. Everything begins now.

She finally realised what her true feelings were.

I'm a greedy girl.

Elvis's voice had almost faded in the room.

But, his words had certainly reached her ears.

Before long, the sounds of Elvis's sleeping breath reached her ears.

Elvis worked non-stop and had accumulated a lot of fatigue.

Was I able to cure him a little?

She thought and whispered in a small, small voice as not to wake Elvis up.

“Thank you very much, Otou-sama.”

She prayed that her words would reach into his dreams.



Behind the Scenes: The Definition of Kindness

“Isma. Can you come back to the mansion today?”

It was rare for brother, who belonged to a different unit than me, to call out to me inside the castle.

I nearly tilted my head in confusion because he had suddenly called out to me, but I immediately understood what he meant.

If I’m not mistaken, father was heading to the fief today. Therefore, brother should be returning to the mansion after work, but something probably came up.

Initially, even if father was away from the mansion for a few days, there was no need for my brother or me to return. There was no reason for us to be anxious about the servant’s managing the mansion. However, for example, if a servant 『wanted a decision to be made, but it wasn’t urgent』, then they would wait for their master, or someone in charge, to return to the mansion. Especially, if they had said it before father left. Fortunately, I didn’t have a night shift today, so there wasn’t anything that needed my urgent attention.

“It may be possible.”

Brother nodded quietly.

“I see. I’m on duty today.”

“I understand. Then I’ll go home instead of you, brother.”

Brother nodded once again when he heard my reply.

He didn’t say a single word about father, but we have already been brothers for over 2 decades. Even if he’d only said a few words, ours was not a relationship where I couldn’t understand what he meant.

After parting with brother, I wrote the overnight application form which would first be submitted to the deputy commander. *It is annoying to fill out the form since the application wouldn’t get rejected in the first place.....* Or so some people thought, but the point of moving to the dormitory was so that 『we could respond immediately in cases of emergency』. It would be meaningless if something unexpected happened and we’re left asking, 『Where is he?』 *Well, there’s a good reason why I don’t have a roommate in the dormitory.* This form wasn’t needed if we just spent the night out while off duty. The deputy commander even went as far as to say, “Your application is really strange,” and was under the impression that I would be leaving for a while.

“Father is at the fief, and older brother was suddenly called on duty. My younger sister is probably anxious too.”

It wasn’t like he was asking me a question or trying to find the reason behind my leaving..... I took this opportunity to say that my younger sister was anxious, but it wasn’t like I thought she would be. This was just small talk.

Then, the deputy commander nodded, “I see,” and then he groaned a little, “Hmm.....”

“Isma, there’s nothing that needs your attention right now, is there?”

“No, nothing.”

If I had work to do, then I wouldn’t ask to stay out in the first place, but he must have a reason for asking. What is it? Did I forget anything? I’m sure I didn’t..... I thought about it, and he uttered some unexpected things.

“Then, you can finish up for the day. You don’t have to rush back tomorrow either.”

“But.....”

I was confused by this sudden declaration, but the deputy commander was nodding, “This is fine.” And he continued while looking satisfied.

“Sometimes, it’s good to have time to spoil your sister, right?”

I was thankful for the proposal itself.

But frankly, I just want to sleep.

Last night, the Queen’s car entered a no-entry zone and stepped on a magic alarm net, which resulted in me being urgently deployed all night long. *I’m glad nothing happened, but I’m sleepy, and I was told something like that while still sleepy.*

Ok! Let’s go home.

I bowed and prepared to take my leave. But, I was halted before I could turn the door.

Don’t tell me he’s going to reject it? I thought, but the deputy commander said, “Uh..... Also.....” *He’s strangely hesitant. It’s rare for him to be like this.* I thought while waiting for him to continue his sentence. The deputy commander eventually told me his request while looking serious.

“Erm..... Since you’re going home, could you ask your sister for some of that medicine to bring back?”

“That medicine?”

“That scented medicine. I have a feeling that it’s really effective. Thanks.”

Sister, you’ve made a fan without knowing.

Cordelia went with father to the fief two months ago. At that time, father received treatment that used a compress to relieve his stiff shoulders, and she told me a little about the result. She looked delighted, so I joked, “I also want to try using it.” As soon as I’d said that, that kid immediately prepared several kinds of essential oils for me.

It can be used as a sedative for stiff shoulders caused by eye fatigue, something that was used for chronic-like fatigue..... Just like that, she gave me several bottles and different combinations of recipes. She also gave me a nice towel to use as a compress. It looked like something father had chosen for her. *I don’t mind receiving it, but, isn’t this something father bought for her? Is it really alright for me to use this?*

Well..... Anyway, I used it when I got back to my room at the dormitory. Then, one day the deputy commander came to my room and said, "What are you doing?" I briefly explained what it was and he said he wanted to try it next time so I lent it to him..... But, he liked the essential oils more than I'd expected he would.

He restrained himself at first, but then when he got used to visiting, he just came whenever he wanted. He came so often that I had to lie, "I've already used it all up."

But, I get it now. Spend time with your sister, he'd said..... But what he probably meant was 'butter your sister up so you can bring more essential oils back'.

I didn't give him any problems and vaguely replied, "If she has stock," before leaving the room.

I wonder how Cordelia would react if she heard about this? I thought as I made arrangements for a carriage to take me home. She probably wouldn't get angry and say, "Don't just let other people use it," but I was a little worried. I guess I should have asked her for permission first..... Even so, the deputy commander coming to my room was a complete surprise, so what could I have done?

He's not a bad person. He's also my superior. I couldn't refuse.

Well, leaving my circumstances aside, Cordelia's great.

Producing a product from a flower that a grown adult, and in addition to that, the deputy commander of the Imperial Guards would want. He might not be interested in the aromas themselves, which Cordelia has placed great importance on, but he knows full well how effective the compress is.

But I wonder if he knows that Cordelia's only 8 years old? If he still wanted the aromas while knowing that a kid is making it, then that's just how amazing Cordelia is.

Because she already has the ability to be recognised by those who don't favour the Pameradia House, in other words, by outsiders. What an amazing girl.

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"Welcome home, Isma-sama."

"Sorry, Hans. I arrived later than I thought I would."

"It is fine. Would you like dinner? We can prepare it right away. Cordelia-sama is currently eating right now."

"If that's the case, then please do. I'll go change."

I said and, instead of going straight to my room, I went to see Cordelia first.

That kid thinks that brother is coming home, not me. So I want to tell her that I came back in his stead.

That's all I wanted to do. That was all I planned to do.

But I froze for a second when I got to the dining room.

No, I knew this. Cordelia ate dinner alone. It was unimaginable to see her eating with the servants. She looked so small and quiet while eating alone in this big dining room. The scene looked lonelier than I thought it would be.

“Oh my, Isma-oniisama? Welcome home.”

“Ah, you don’t have you get up. Keep eating. I’m home, Cordelia. Brother’s busy with work today, so I came back. Are you surprised?”

“Yes, a little. But I’m happy that you’re back.”

I thought, *she’s grown up to be such a good kid*, while remembering that uncomfortable feeling.

Because isn’t this too lonely?

The person herself didn’t seem to think that there was any problem with this setting, of course.

Because she has always been eating by herself like this. For her, this was 『normal』. It probably didn’t occur to her that having a meal like this was lonely.

To begin with, I have never been to a bustling dining room table at home before. I mostly had my meal with brother, and, even if we talked, it was always me who took the initiative; so we hadn’t talked about anything exciting. Brother matured early, and I didn’t really care since he was like that. If older sister was here, then we might have had a little more conversation, but she usually had her meals with mother, who was a shut-in.

However, now I have lunch at the dining hall in the dormitory and castle, so I was accustomed to a somewhat livelier scene. Of course, the dormitory’s dining hall wasn’t bustling like a bar and people were better behaved.....

“..... Onii-sama?”

“Oh, nothing, sorry. I’m here today so you can tell me anything without hesitation.”

Cordelia must have felt something off since I was silent and I quickly tried to smooth things over, but the questioning expression on her face didn’t fade.

..... *Well, of course not.* I insisted, “I’m dazed because I’m a bit hungry.” *Yup, that’s good. I could also use that as an excuse to stay here.*

“..... Hans, do you mind if I wait for my meal here after all?”

“No, of course not.”

I’ll change my clothes later. I usually eat in outfits like this anyways. It’s not a problem. Hans’ expression didn’t change, but I could feel him looking at me with a slightly warm gaze. *It’s fine, whatever. I lost all desire to return to my room after I saw this scene.*

I told Cordelia, “You can eat without minding me too much,” and put the aperitif to my mouth.

Oh, delicious. I did my best today, so I could drink this.....

That’s not it. There’s no point in me staying here if I just drink alcohol in silence.

“What did you do today, Cordelia?”

“I took care of the flower beds because new seeds arrived today.”

“You did? You seem happy.”

“Yes. I can finally do new things, and it’s fun.”

“Do you want to go look for plants again?”

“..... Could I?”

She held back from accepting my invitation, but she looked pleased and smiled.

It wasn’t a big deal, but if she was this happy about it, then I wanted to do it. It’s too much if you think this boring way of eating is natural.

(..... Even so, I wonder if she’s pleased about it. I’m not too sure.)

I didn’t want to doubt her smile, but I have past experience with this. Of her being troubled that is.

She also acted very naturally at that time, so I do wonder..... If she’s also troubled right now.

There was also a phrase called ‘overdoing it’.

If so, then it might be good for me just to drop it..... But, it wasn’t like that. Frankly speaking, I think I’m only meddling with her for my own self-satisfaction. This kid might not even be dissatisfied with eating alone, and she comes up with a lot of plans for her favourite research. Therefore, it wouldn’t be a problem for her if I don’t get involved with her at all.

But I’m sure that’s just because she 『doesn’t know』. This kid is a genius. I even think that she would accomplish more if she could get her hands on more information.

Honestly, I’ve never thought like this before. Or rather, I felt that it would be better if I put a certain distance between us. But now, I really want to help her out because she looks so frank and hardworking.

A kid who believes that she could 『do it』. She was completely different from me, who gave up because I noticed my own limits early on. That’s why I want to be of some help to her.

But, I also think that this is me pressing my own expectations onto her. Even I know that I’m a bad brother. I wish I could love my little sister a little more honestly.

I thought as I ate the appetiser that had already been placed on the table..... Then I noticed it.

“..... The dressing looks like it’s changed a little.”

The vegetables in the salad were the same as usual, but the seasoning was slightly different. I thought that it might have been a new recipe and then Cordelia smiled happily.

“The recipe for the dressing is still the same, but the herbs used are different.”

“Excuse me?”

“The chefs used to use imported herbs, but now they’re using the herbs that I grew in my greenhouse. The seeds the head chef got me have already grown, so I wanted to try it. I also got them to use new herbs with fish and meat. The new aromas are also being extracted from this herb.”

Cordelia said that and I shrugged my shoulders; *she really likes medicinal herbs, doesn’t she?*

I know that I have better taste than most people, but I don’t eat at home much, so I didn’t notice this straight away..... But the flavour is that different, huh.

“..... O-onii-sama.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Mm..... It’s not like I’m a glutton or anything, okay?”

My eyes widened at those words.

I didn’t think that way, but Cordelia’s words could certainly be taken that way. No, well, if she were obsessed with food then she would have been focused elsewhere, ——— like on side dishes..... But since this little lady looked so cute worrying about her own reputation in her own way, I chose to keep my mouth shut. I hope she can forgive this much from me.

But, I didn’t want to make it worse, so I changed the subject. Well, it was actually a request.

Yes, it’s about deputy commander’s request.

“Cordelia, could you please give me more of the ingredients in the compress that you gave me before?”

“Huh? Of course, I can.”

Cordelia was surprised at the sudden change of topic.

Was it too abrupt? I thought while feeling relieved that she accepted and continued.

“That’s great. The deputy commander really likes it and came to me to ask for this favour.”

“The..... deputy commander?”

“Yes, the deputy commander of the second corps.”

Cordelia froze for a second.

Her expression said that she didn’t understand how the essential oils got into that person’s hands. *Well, of course, she would look like that, yeah. I get it. But this is the first time I’ve seen her really puzzled.* She stared at me and spoke as if she’d finally resolved herself.

“So, that Deputy Commander-sama likes the product..... Is that what you’re saying?”

“Yeah.”

“If that’s the case, then I’d be happy to give it to him. If possible, could Deputy Commander-sama tell me about his lifestyle and bad conditions? That way I could mix and match the essential oils to suit him.”

She has a lot of courage.

Was it natural for her to adapt this fast, even though she was surprised? She had already calmed down and was making sale pitches like a merchant.

And isn't that good for you, deputy commander. My sister readily agreed.

But, I feel a little uneasy with a proposal that would make that deputy commander happy.

"Of course, the deputy commander would be happy if you can dispense something for him. But, he might get so happy about it that he might let it slip. Then, the other members might want it to. You'll be troubled if that happens, right?"

"That's..... You're right. It'll also take up a lot of time. But, if it makes them happy, I'll be happy to do it even if it might be challenging."

Cordelia smiled, and I thought, *she's really a good kid*, but then straight after, I felt like I heard the words, "Advertisements are important after all," and swallowed my words..... *There's no way she said that, probably. Yeah, it's not like an eight-year-old kid to be that calculating.*

"I should thank you. Cordelia, if there's anything you're troubled over you can rely on me."

"Really?"

"What is it? Are you troubled over something?"

I was just telling her to keep that in mind, but I didn't think that she would have something that she was troubled over right now. I can't imagine anything troubling her.

"I wouldn't go as far as to say it is troubling me..... But actually, I'd like you to teach me how to play cards."

"Cards?"

"Actually, Vernoux-sama....."

..... I see. So to summarise, her troubles involve the Flantheim's young master. That is to say, the Flantheim's young master learnt a card game and proposed that they play a game. However, Cordelia didn't know the rules. It seems that he did teach her how to play, but he had only explained it, so she still doesn't get it. Therefore, they still can't play seriously against each other.

Well, of course. There are times when you might expose your hand by asking questions if it's only two people playing. So, it wasn't suitable to do so when playing one-on-one.

But, if that's Cordelia's request, then it's a piece of cake for me. Anyhow, I knew so much about card games that people mistakenly call me a gambler.

"I don't mind. It's easier to understand if you play the game anyways. I'll ask Hans to help out later too. Cordelia, you should sit behind me so you can see my hand. I'll teach you what happens each time."

"Thank you very much, Onii-sama."

“Play with me sometimes too when you remember the rules. Oh right, I should also invite brother to play with us.”

“..... Isma-oniisama, you’re really kind.”

“I am?”

“Oh my, do you not realise it yourself?”

What tremendous things are you suddenly saying? She looked as if she was having fun unrevealing a riddle.

But, I didn’t understand what she meant.

“I’m not kind.”

However, she didn’t agree with me and refused without changing her tone.

“Onii-sama is kind. Otou-sama said that being humble isn’t a virtue, you know?”

“I don’t mean to be humble at all.”

However, Cordelia’s expression got cloudy while I was speaking.

“I’m sorry, Onii-sama. I put you on the spot.”

And then she said that.

Dammit, I failed. My tone might have gotten a little harsh. Aren’t you a bit childish towards your little sister? Such things crossed my mind, and the words that Cordelia said next were absolutely unexpected.

“People who are kind don’t usually say that they are kind, do they?”

“Oh, yeah. I guess..... So?”

On a closer look, her expression wasn’t cloudy, she was just slanting her eyebrows.

I understand what Cordelia is saying. People did it as a joke, but I’ve never seen a kind person say, “I’m kind.”

“If you really don’t think you’re kind at all, Onii-sama, then I’ll be worried that you’re a natural womaniser, you know?”

“Woma.....”

Where did she learn that word? A book? Did she learn it from a book or from Ronnie?

But, if I deny it now, then she’ll conclude that I’m a womaniser. I don’t want that to happen.

“..... I’ll try.”

I wanted to say a lot of things, but I compromised first. No matter what I say, she’ll just reply with an unexpected answer.

Instead, I decided to ask her one thing.

“Why do you think I’m kind, Cordelia?”

“Because Onii-sama chooses things that makes me happy.”

Her reply was quite simple.

But that’s normal, isn’t it? What would happen if I force things on her that doesn’t make her happy? ——— I thought, but.....

“So even if Onii-sama doesn’t think of himself as so, I’ll still think you’re kind.”

Any objections I had were dissolved with those words. *Oh yes, 『kind』 might be a word that someone says to you and not something you decide yourself.* I had a lot of complaints, but Cordelia had said she’ll still think I’m kind, so her opinion of me won’t change no matter what I say.

But, her thoughts were really creepy. No one has ever given me a pure compliment. But, I do have something that I want to say.

“Thanks.”

I’m sure my expression doesn’t match my tone.

But, I feel a little lighter.

Epilogue: Monologue of the Prince's First Love

I met Dilly as 『Gille』 and began exchanging letters with her..... I tried desperately to hold back my happy feelings when I received my first present from her.

It is currently my break time between studying. Although it is my break time, it isn't good for me to be dazed.

However, I couldn't hide the smile that wouldn't leave my face. As a result, Vernoux said something unpleasant, "That's quite a gross look you have on your face."

Of course, even I'm aware that my face is melting, but it's mortifying to be called gross because of it.

"It's a present from her first time visiting her fief, you know? So, of course, I'd be happy, why wouldn't I be?"

"She gave it to you because you gave her a rose first. Isn't she just being sensible?"

"I'm happy that she chose a paper knife for me. She probably chose it because we're exchanging letters. It's beautiful and has practical use. Of course, it's fine to leave it somewhere as decoration as well."

"Well, the knife isn't sharp, so it probably doesn't mean that she wants to cut off your relationship. Aren't you glad?"

"Vernoux, you jealous?"

"Nope, I'm shocked. I got something else from her. Anyway, why do I have to be jealous?"

I stared suspiciously at him as he said that, but I didn't say any more than that. *I'll be troubled if he actually likes her, and I'd rather feel relieved.* I stared at the paper knife in my hands.

『Thank you for everything Gille-sama』

Those words made me happy. The letter, which had been delivered with the knife, had said that she was using the same paper knife.

However, there was a voice that was interrupting my happiness coming from the side.

"Gille, have you forgotten the most important thing?"

"What?"

"Dilly likes knights and people who don't lie. What can you do when you're hiding your own social status, and to top that off, you'll never be able to become a knight, because you're the prince?"

The truth hit home. Pain ran through my head as if a real sword was stabbed in it.

As Vernoux said, I'm the first heir to the throne of Crista Kingdom, Sylvester. It's impossible for me to become a knight and it's not easy for me to reveal my social status.

"What can I do.....? That's why I'm troubled!"

I wanted to talk to her after my mother took me to visit the Pameradia House for the first time to see their greenhouse.

She was using magic and was enveloped in a mysterious hue. She had a warm aura, and I couldn't help but want to call out to her.

However, my wish didn't come true.

"Don't disturb her," Mother said, and wouldn't let me talk to her. I kept glancing at her while waiting for my chance, and I ended up watching her one-sidedly. However, the opportunity never came, and I wasn't able to hear her voice that day.

(I wonder what she's like.)

I thought as I recalled the gentle magic power she was cladded in and her earnest expression. *I really want to talk to her at least once.*

At that time, I heard that Vernoux became friends with her through his father. I couldn't help but think that he was sly, well, I actually said it to him as well.

But, Vernoux was just amused by it.

Still, he would talk about her sometimes.

But, in the end, those are just things that happened between him and her. I wanted to talk to her more whenever I heard him talk about her.

An invitation was sent to the Pameradia House inviting her to the castle. A tea party, gathering the children who will play an essential role in this kingdom, was held at fixed intervals at the castle. I also made up reasons for why I'd invited her.

But, she never came.

Vernoux invited her to the castle many times, but she would always come up with reasons for why she couldn't come.

I wanted to sulk.

To be honest, I finally recognise the difference now, since the other young ladies would come to the castle even if I don't invite them here. It was thanks to her that I noticed that I was doing something extremely shameful.

I reflected on that and decided to take a different approach..... I wasn't able to endure it anymore, after all, and finally invited her straight through the Pameradia House.

But, he refused and said that his daughter was an introvert.

I thought that was a little strange.

I heard that she wasn't timid from Vernoux. It didn't seem like she was an introvert, and I heard that she was brimming with curiosity. So why wouldn't she come to the castle? Why wouldn't she come to see me.....? When I thought that, Vernoux made a suggestion.

“Why don’t you go and see her? And while you’re at it, you can visit the town as well.”

It was an invitation to go incognito.

It certainly seemed possible to sneak out with Vernoux’s transformation magic, which he was gifted with since birth. I hesitated, but finally gave in and sneaked out into town for the first time.

And, the girl named Cordelia, who we happened to meet in town, was far from timid; she was a courageous, calm and brilliant girl.

Until then, I had just wanted to talk to her.

But now, I think it’s love at first sight.

Things happened, and I made her angry; Vernoux also got mad at me and when I got back to the castle; mother was angry at me. But, I was happy. Thanks to that incident, Vernoux stopped being formal with me. No, the real reason why he’d stopped was 『because it’s troublesome to separate language used between the town and castle, so I’ll just call you Gille when we’re alone』. But he probably wants to invite me to go into town incognito again, since he’d made that suggestion. It’s nice to have a friend who would get angry at me.

Yes, I was thrilled that he invited me out with him..... But, at the same time, I still regret it a little that I didn’t introduce myself back then.

I wonder how great it would have been if I’d just introduced myself as Sylvester then. I probably wouldn’t be worrying this much right now if I’d done that, but there’s no way I could have introduced myself back there.

I only have one appearance whenever Vernoux uses his transformation magic on me. Vernoux, himself, had several aliases, but he could only cast one form for others. Therefore, I couldn’t say tell someone who I’d just met about my alias, because I don’t know what I would use it for in the future.

Therefore, he said I was, 『Gille』.

However..... It was something painful now that we’ve reached this point.

“I could finally exchange letters with her now, but to act like Gille now is..... It is harsh to be thought of as a lie, and it doesn’t change the fact that I’m lying to her, even if she does believe me. And stops replying because of that, then we won’t be able to interact with each other anymore.”

“Well, it’s not like you’ll be praised as a prince for telling the truth. Also, even if you say you two interact, it’s only through letters. And, I’ve been forced to be a carrier pigeon for your letters every time.”

“In the first place..... It’s hard to tell her that my name is Sylvester when I find out why she won’t meet me.”

“She’s clearly avoiding you.”

Vernoux didn’t keep a lid on his words, like always, but that was indeed true.

I was forced to understand this from the way she continued to refuse my invitations.

But, please don't say it out loud. I'll receive more damage if I'm told it.

I don't know why, but she's avoiding me.

There's no way that she wasn't coming to the castle because she is timid. She acted that confidently after all. Why wouldn't she meet me? I don't remember doing anything bad to her. Or rather, it was impossible to meet with her in the first place.

"You don't have to be that impatient. You'll be able to meet her at evening parties in less than 10 years."

"You don't understand how I feel because you see her regularly. For example, what should I do if she has a fiancé in 10 years?"

Just thinking about it made me depressed. I probably won't be able to talk to her with ease. I couldn't even hear Vernoux when he said, "You're already head over heels for her, aren't you?"

"Ah! I don't think that would happen. I heard the Earl dotes on his daughter."

Of course, those words didn't reach me either. *How do I get close to her?* That was the only thing on my mind.

"Come to think of it, I've asked Dilly what she thought about His Highness before."

"What did she say.....?"

"She's not interested. She also said that the King's reign is magnificent."

I'm sure of it.

Vernoux is testing my will.

But, she didn't say she hated me, so I think I'm still safe.

..... But, it's complicated.

If I had to say it, then we've started on the wrong foot, so what do I have to do to get back onto the starting line? Should I aim to be as strong as a knight without actually becoming one? Or should I obtain both knowledge and strength like Earl Pameradia, who is also known as the legendary knight? Or should I become splendid at ruling like father, so that she'd turn to look at me?

"....."

"Gille?"

"Vernoux, accompany for a bit."

I don't think I can just sit still.

I thought as I looked at Vernoux. He shrugged and said, "Yeah, okay. I understand." He already had the wooden sword in his hand. It was a little vexing that he could read my mind.

Therefore, I won't lose in this match. I'll do what I can do now.

Yes, I swore on my little pride.

Special: Those Words, the Self-Explanatory Remedy

On that day, Vernoux, who usually came to eat sweets at the Pameradia House, was unusually depressed.

“You seem very tired.”

“Yeah, a little.”

His reply was not one an eight-year-old boy would say. He sounded like an adult tired from their work.

(If you're that tired, then you don't need to come here.)

If this isn't an urgent matter, and his purpose is sweets, then it's necessary for him to rest away his tiredness. However, when she looked at Vernoux, he looked like he was brooding over something, rather than being physically tired.

“Is something troubling you?”

Cordelia asked, and he nodded gravely.

“Gille is.....”

“What is wrong with Gille-sama?”

“He's been obsessed with milk, or rather dairy products, lately.”

“..... It's healthy, isn't it?”

“But there's a limit, isn't there! When we have tea time after training, it's all milk. The sweets also consist of yoghurt, blanc-manger and cheese..... Anyway, he doesn't stray from dairy products.”

At that time, Cordelia whispered in her mind, “It wasn't something worrying, after all.”

Vernoux sighed deeply, and Cordelia realised something.

“I think that you've tried plenty of our sweets Vernoux-sama, but what about Gille-sama?”

“He eats it if it's served.”

So he's not eating those things because he wants more.

“Argh, enough. He won't stop despite hating milk.....”

“Oh my, then why all of a sudden?”

“Probably because he wants to get taller. Because a certain someone is so tall.”

“Tall? A certain someone?”

I don't remember how tall he was, but he didn't seem that short. She tilted her head in confusion.

“Ah..... Perhaps, are Gille-sama's parents tall?”

“Parents? Well, his father's tall, but not as tall as Earl Pameradia.”

I see, maybe he wants to catch up to his father. While I do think boys are charming, there's something I want to tell them if they want to get taller.

"I'm sorry, but just drinking milk isn't going to make you taller. A balanced diet, sleep and exercise are also important for growth. However, putting on too much muscle while you're young isn't good either."

Vernoux's eyes twinkled, and then he grinned.

"Hey, that, can I say tell Gille that you said that, Dilly?"

"Huh? Yes. You may."

Cordelia nodded while worrying about his scheming.

"But, I don't think my words have any credibility to them."

"Dilly's words are more effective than a doctor's medical certificate right now for Gille. In fact, your words might be the most effective. I want to be free from milk too."

"You're exaggerating."

"I'm not. I wonder if I should also tell him that he'll never catch up to you if he continues his unbalanced diet."

"Huh?"

"Nothing. Don't you have any sweets that don't use milk?"

Vernoux demanded sweets as he became energetic.

Cordelia shrugged and entertained her friend while thinking that Gill might have an ulterior motive for commencing this milk attack, to escape from Vernoux's sweets demands.

Act 12: First Battle Invitation

Four years had already passed since Cordelia received the greenhouse and laboratory from her father, Elvis.

At first, various plants were grown in the spacious greenhouse. Similarly, the laboratory was neatly lined with a lot of equipment; so much so that she struggled to fit more in.

Cordelia Enna Pameradia, the spring of her 12th year.

She returned to the mansion after a long time carrying a lot of luggage in the refreshing weather. Of course, she wasn't alone. She was with Elvis and the servants who were carrying their luggage. Cordelia had accompanied Elvis on his inspection to the south until then.

After the inspection at the fief, Cordelia would often accompany Elvis on his inspections. As with this time, they didn't just inspect towns in the fief, but also towns out of the fief, as well. During the inspections, Cordelia had the opportunity to practice the basic trading skills that she'd learnt from Elvis prior to leaving, and she traded for various things. She had made quite a good profit from the mushroom and fruits which could be collected from the fief, and she had also made a big profit from cameo[1] related products, such as engraved stones and shells.

When Cordelia had first seen cameo in this world, it hadn't been recognised as a typical accessory yet, and were only sold in small quantities as traditional crafts from across the sea in stalls of port towns. However, it was very beautiful and Cordelia thought that it might sell well if she brought it back to the fief, just as it was.

There were a lot of simple flowers and birds on cameo designs, but then she suddenly remembered that there were cameos with young ladies' face profiles. So, she asked the merchants, who sold the cameos at their stall, 『if they could, as craftsmen, carve the profile of young ladies onto the cameos』 via wholesale traders.

Her request was accepted and the result..... They sold at a tremendous rate. The cameos were sold out as soon as they arrived.

Of course, that was also because the cameos were beautiful and rare, and it came in many forms, such as brooches and necklaces. However, that wasn't the only reason; another reason why it sold so quickly was because of her request to engrave young ladies' face profiles onto them. That design created a fad amongst the ladies, 『I want something that resembles my face』. Cordelia never imagined that such a fad would be created from carvings that weren't especially modelled after anyone, and had lit the ladies' desire to purchase it. The fad, which spread vigorously in Ertiga, also reached the Royal Capital. Now, cameos were recognised as an accessory and were in demand, even in the Royal Capital. The price of the cameo depended on labour time and colour of the materials, so commoners could also purchase some designs as luxury items, while nobles could boast about the cost of the cameos. It could also be said that the cameos were popularised by a broad variety of buyers, and became fashionable.

However, merchants, who follow fads, also appeared. But, in the first place, it was difficult to receive a large amount of hand-carved items, and, in addition, Cordelia had contracted the skilled craftsman first,

so the cameos that went through the Pameradia House were recognised as the ones with the most value. And, even when the fad started dying down, the new accessory called cameo had been established.

Moreover, the merchants who had originally sold the cameo were also thankful, after the fad died down. The merchants, who up until then, had only sold flower and bird cameos, became more marketable thanks to that recognition.

She didn't just purchase things from others, she also tried exporting the jewellery boxes, made from the wood which was a special product of the Pameradia fief. The classy jewellery boxes, which had deep bottoms and a slightly reddish tint, were highly sought after across the ocean and she was able to build a good relationship with the traders there. Sometimes, the exported jewellery boxes would be decorated with cameos and then exported again.

And, Cordelia decided to put the money she'd accumulated from the profits towards repaying her loan for the establishment of the school in Caina Village. She had saved enough money to repay the loan she'd received from Elvis four years prior.

"..... You paid it off extremely fast."

That was the first thing Elvis told Cordelia when she reported to him that she could pay back the loan. She bowed deeply in thanks at the usual flat-toned Elvis.

"It is thanks to Otou-sama's continued guidance. I don't know when I would have been able to return this money if I had to do it myself."

"I certainly gave you advice, but you would have made a loss if you didn't understand what I taught you."

Elvis had said that in a plain tone, but Cordelia understood that he was giving her a compliment. She heard him imply, "You did a great job." Therefore, naturally, the corners of her mouth loosened.

"I would also like to make small contributions to support them in the future. I know..... It's just Caina Village, but I would like to watch over the place that I influenced."

"I'm not planning to object to your personal backing. It's my job..... To equally give support to the public."

Elvis said that and received the money from Cordelia.

She was relieved.

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Now, the pictures that were drawn with charcoal by the students, who were good at drawing, were hung up at the school in Caina Village. 『Ayesha-sensei』, 『Feudal Lord』, and then 『Cordelia-sama』. In addition, next to those drawings was a drawing of a baker with a long explanation written, 『The Baker who makes delicious bread with the wheat from Caina Village』.

Out of those four drawings, Cordelia felt that hers was the only one that wasn't being praised based on her ability. Of course, it wasn't like she wanted compliments, but she felt guilty for having her picture up there with the others. Therefore, with that, there was no need for her to feel embarrassed anymore,

even if the pictures were lined up like that. And, apart from that, she was happy because she felt like Elvis had praised her a little.

Cordelia also heard that the school was a running well.

She didn't go to the fief a lot, though she visited Caina Village every time she did go. But, the number of times she has visited Caina Village could only be counted on one hand. However, other than the regular reports she received, she also received letters from the 2nd teacher who took over from Aisha, the daughter of the acting lord of Pameradia fief, Zeke Gargotta. She also received letters from the students.

Also..... The fact that they had no choice but to accept that education was important was made known to the villagers when the school opened.

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Aisha had visited her at the Pameradia mansion, without any prior notice, to bring her information about the three months after the school had opened.

When Cordelia first saw Aisha, she thought that Aisha was visiting her since she was going to her fiancé Warren's place anyways. That was why she had been surprised to see her; she was delighted to be reunited with her and had hoped that they could talk over tea..... But, she couldn't relax at all because of what Aisha had to talk about. It was rather cute and surprising that Aisha had visited her.

She talked about the day the village chief visited the school.

The village chief, who could read a little, showed a wheat contract to the children and asked them questions.

"If you're really studying, then read this."

The village chief probably wanted to know if there was any point for the children to suddenly start going to school, and if the children were really absorbing the information they were taught.

The contract was written with formal words and the children couldn't understand everything. However, even if they connected the parts which they understood together and read it, they would say, "There's something weird about this contract," and tilt their heads in confusion.

The children were all stuck on the same part.

『When B purchases wheat exceeding the fixed amount from A, B will be entitled to purchase the excess amount at 30% of the estimated value』

The children didn't understand who A and B referred to.

They really felt something wasn't right because 『Standard values appear in the problems Aisha-sensei makes, but this sentence didn't have them』. Some children were particularly clever and they questioned whether the price changed considerably depending on the amount of wheat purchased.

The answer was one the children gave while feeling like it was simple.

"If you ask Aisha-sensei then you'll know the correct answer!"

The village chief was reluctant at first when he'd heard the children's proposal.

Aisha wasn't someone from Caina Village. The village chief knew what kind of person Aisha was, but he still felt opposed to giving village information to an outsider. However, the children insisted that the contract wasn't good so, in the end, he showed Aisha the contract.

Then, it was discovered that the wheat was bought at an unreasonably cheap price.

Aisha read the contract and appealed to how unfair it was to the village chief. "Small amounts of wheat were purchased at a reasonable price, but otherwise it was sold cheaper than wheat in other fiefs," she'd said. Aisha told her that the main reason why nobody noticed that it was being sold at such a ridiculous price was probably because it was being purchased at incredibly large amounts and that the other party knew that the contractor wouldn't notice that fact.

The village chief knew that he had caused his village a big loss, was upset for a while, and couldn't speak. However, he approved of the school when his brain started moving again.

"Education is certainly necessary," he'd said.

And, the adults of the village agreed with the village chief's words.

Cordelia muttered while drinking her already cold cup of tea in the middle of the report.

"As expected of Aisha-sama's students, to be able to detect a fact that the village chief couldn't in just three months."

"No, it's really a coincidence. If the village chief hadn't tried to test the children, then the contract would have never made it to me."

"But the children didn't let that chance get away. It's the result of your teaching, Aisha-sama."

Aisha's desire to [teach the children] saved the village. Desire becomes power, she was the person who embodied this. Cordelia felt a lot of respect for her when she thought that.

"..... If you're going to say that, then it should be as expected of Cordelia-sama, right?"

"Huh?"

"Because, I would only be dreaming about teaching if it wasn't for Cordelia-sama's help. Therefore, I really think that Cordelia-sama is the one who saved the village."

Cordelia tried to deny it. If she were to admit it, then she thought it would be Elvis' achievement.

But, she stopped when she saw the look in Aisha's eyes. Aisha wasn't just flattering her. She really thought that way, just like Cordelia did.

"Then..... Should we toast?"

"It's nice to toast with tea, isn't it?"

They knew it wasn't good manners to do so, but it felt perfect since they were both praising each other.

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However, even if education was accepted in the village because of that, it didn't mean that everything was solved. To begin with, a few schools had been established, including the one in Caina Village. The current schools were being supported by the Pameradia House, but if schools were established in other areas as well, then it was necessary to collect tax to maintain them.

(I'm free to support them even if they become a public school, but I need to maintain balance.)

For example, if the sales of balm was on track in the future, then more money would roll into her lap. If so, then sending simple stationery wouldn't dent it much. There was a saying that went 'don't count your chickens before they hatch', but the more goals she had, the more motivated she was.

(Then, I have to steadily continue with my research.)

She thought that and went back to her own room to change into her research outfit.

Then, she visited the greenhouse accompanied by Emina, the maid in charge of her, and afterwards she stepped into the laboratory after a long time.

The analysis magician, Ronnie, was elegantly sipping tea in the laboratory, even though it wasn't break time.

"Oh, welcome home, Ojou-sama."

"I'm back, Ronnie."

"Where did you go this time?"

"To the south. Emina, give that bag to Ronnie."

"Yes, Ojou-sama."

"Is it a souvenir? Is it sweets or something? But, it's awfully bulky."

Ronnie, who received the bag from Emina, opened it and clearly looked disappointed.

"..... What is this lumpy thing? It's not food, is it?"

"You're half right and half wrong. It's called 『ginger』. There's two bags in that paper bag, isn't there? The gunny bag is made of something called Curcuma and is used for display. The paper bag has the edible stuff."

However, Ronnie's expression didn't brighten up even when he heard it was 'food'. Rather, he looked like he would sigh at any moment now.

"Ojou-sama, you really like root-type foods, don't you? Even before..... Was it called burdock? That long thin root."

"Burdock is rich in dietary fibres and is good for the body. It's not mainly used in this kingdom, but it's common in places across the ocean. And ginger goes really well with meat dishes."

"It goes well with meat? That's good..... Not. Ojou-sama, putting aside ginger, I don't understand your hobby of collecting things that aren't mainstream here. Tofu, was it? What's so good about that

tasteless bean pudding? I expected it to have a lot of taste when you obtained the soybeans and happily instructed the servants.”

“I honestly don’t know what you’re thinking,” he said, but he looked like he was having fun so she retorted without hesitation.

“In the first place, turnips and carrots are also roots. You eat them, don’t you Ronnie? The tofu that you’re calling extremely dull is good for your health.”

“It’s not dull; there’s no taste!”

“That’s because you ate it as it is, Ronnie. If you’d put pachō sauce on it then the taste would have changed!”

Personally, I don’t think plain tofu tastes bad. Of course, I love seasoning it with rock salt or ginger, which I obtained this time. But, that’s because I remember being used to eating it. Ronnie wouldn’t feel the same way I do.

(..... Well, if I just sell tofu by itself, then more people apart from Ronnie would call it ‘tasteless’ because they’ll probably eat it just as it is.)

Well then, why don’t I think of some sweets for tofu? If I mix with fried sweets like donuts, then people definitely won’t eat tofu by itself. Then, I wouldn’t have to be subjected to Ronnie’s ‘tasteless pudding’ stigma.

“Let’s leave the matter of the tofu aside for a moment..... Ronnie, can you run an errand for me? I also bought a souvenir for Aisha-oneesama.”

“Me?”

“Yes. Can I rely on you?”

Aisha safely moved to her residence in the Royal Capital and got married that year. Thus, becoming a viscountess. It seemed that Cordelia’s measures against hay fever worked well, and Aisha would joke that she currently wasn’t getting covered in tears or a runny nose. Their schedules didn’t met up, so it was difficult for them to meet, but they would often exchange letters through Ronnie.

“Yes, it’s my pleasure. May I take a detour?”

“Make sure that..... you don’t use more time on your detour than your errand.”

Cordelia understood that Ronnie wasn’t just joking, so she gave him a warning, but he remained carefree. It was reassuring that he was looking forward to his errand, but it wasn’t good to muck around too much.

Therefore, Cordelia presented her trump card to Ronnie.

“Ronnie. I had the opportunity to visit your family home, the Eris Firm, when I went on an inspection to the south, and I had the opportunity to meet the employees there.”

“Uogh?!”

“But, the Director-sama..... I could meet Ronnie’s Otou-sama, Okaa-sama or your Onii-samas. They asked me to take care of you, you know?”

Ronnie couldn’t meet her in the eyes after she’d said that. He hadn’t expected her to say the name of his house. Cordelia had contacted the Eris firm because she wanted to consult with them about trade routes, so it had nothing to do with Ronnie, but she felt that she gained an unexpected result from it.

“I saw the greenhouse a while ago. A lot of the flowers are blooming, so I want to try harvest a new essential oil. Emina, could I ask you to be the first tester?”

“Of course, Ojou-sama.”

“Ah, Ojou-sama. For the time being, I’ve made a waiting list for the servants who want to receive the aroma massages. It would probably be difficult with too many testers, so we’ll look at the condition of their magic power to some extent and decide the order.”

Ronnie handed Cordelia a blank piece of paper as if to say he was also doing his work properly.

It was different from four years ago, when she’d first started her experiment, now, the servants wanted to participate in her experiment even if she didn’t pay them..... Or rather, the recruitment of testers had become a major event, like a festival, already. At first, Cordelia smiled a little bitterly that the experiment no one wanted to volunteer themselves for had suddenly become so popular.

Of course, she was happy. She thought it was a joyous thing. However, it also made her realise that things wouldn’t proceed easily if people didn’t obtain a 『sense of security』.

(This got popular amongst the servants by word of mouth, so I hope that it would also become popular amongst the nobles as well.)

So I have to gain their trust after all, don’t I? It’s fun to think about these things, but I have to use my head for difficult things, after all.

When Cordelia thought that, a woman’s voice resounded through the laboratory.

“You seem to be having a lot of fun.”

“Nirupama-obasama? It’s been a while!”

“Hello, Cordelia.”

Countess Nirupama Weltoria showed up at the open door.

She was one of the few female countesses in this kingdom, the ruler of the fief where only women inherited the title, and also the older sister of Cordelia’s mother..... In short, her aunt. She radiated confidence and always had her head held high, and faced firmly forward. The dignified Nirupama was famous in high society and Cordelia heard from her second brother, Isma, that she was at the forefront of cutting-edge of fashion. Nirupama’s face was very similar to her mother’s, but Cordelia thought that they didn’t look like sisters at all, because their facial expression were different.

Nirupama often came to the Pameradia mansion when she was staying at the Royal Capital two years prior. But, until then, she had never met with her sister. The reason why Nirupama came to the

Pameradia mansion was, of course, to talk to Elvis, but those meetings probably only took half the time in those visits. She spent the remaining half visiting Cordelia with sweets.

However, she seemed empty handed today.

“Oh, you don’t have to prepare any tea today. I came on urgent business, so I don’t have much time.”

“Urgent business? Then shall we go to a different room?”

Nirupama had never come to see her if she had to return home straight away. *If it’s something serious, then would it be better for me to tell Emina and Ronnie to go out of the room?*

However, Nirupama quickly spoke to Cordelia, whose expression was changing.

“You don’t have to be that defensive. I brought you an invitation today.”

“An invitation, was it?”

An important invitation. Cordelia gulped.

(Don’t tell me she’s going to make those joke-like comments about me becoming her adopted child.....?)

Nirupama informed Cordelia with a friendly smile.

“I have been invited to the Flantheim House’s evening party, so you come too. You know their son, right?”

“..... Excuse me?”

Cordelia froze for a moment because the invitation was completely different from what she’d expected Nirupama to talk about.

Ah, yes. Even if she says it’s an important matter, there’s no way she’d try to persuade me into becoming her adopted child when she has no time..... Cordelia thought that, but she couldn’t understand Nirupama’s intentions.

“The Flantheim House’s evening party, was it?”

Cordelia tilted her head at the same time she said that. Of course, it wasn’t like she didn’t understand the meaning of those words. There was probably an evening party at her friend Vernoux’s mansion. It was close to Vernoux’s birthday, and she’d heard from him that the Marquis hosted evening parties in celebration.

But, Cordelia had never been to it before. She had given Vernoux a gift every year for his birthday, but she had never been to the evening party..... Or rather, she would see Elvis off as he attended those parties with an extremely sullen face while saying, “I’m off.”

Therefore, she couldn’t grasp why Nirupama invited her. *What the hell is the meaning of this?*

Nirupama laughed at Cordelia’s reaction.

“I wanted the adorable Cordelia to make her debut. Of course, I know that Marquis Flantheim knows you. And I know you’re not a shut-in and that you travel around the kingdom with Elvis-sama. Therefore, you can socialise more with adults than ordinary children, right? But you can’t do the same with children or women, am I right? Since there’s finally an evening party, I wanted to take this opportunity to show you off.”

However, Cordelia was more confused by Nirupama’s remark. But, Nirupama paid no attention to her confusion.

“I don’t think it’s a bad deal for you. I think you know how adults interact with each other from your inspections. But, it’s also important for you to see and learn how politics works in noble societies. It’ll be fine. It’s an evening party for his son, so there’ll be a lot of children there. You can take it easy.”

“What did Otou-sama say?”

“Elvis-sama said that one of his sons would be going on his behalf because his schedule is a bit strict this year..... But, when I told him that I was going to take you, he said that he’ll go himself.”

“..... Will Otou-sama be alright since he’s busy with work?”

“It’s fine, no problems. It’s that Elvis-sama, you know? No one would complain even if he’s a little behind on work.”

No, that’s not what I meant.

Her aunt, who was laughing, ohoho, probably said it so that she wouldn’t worry, but that wasn’t what she was worried about. Cordelia was worried that he would push himself to finish the work so that he wouldn’t be behind on work; but the invitation had already been decided anyway. Therefore, Cordelia had no reason to refuse.



(Just.... Of course, I'm happy that Otou-sama would be coming with me, but I don't mind if Onii-sama goes as well, so please don't push yourself.)

Cordelia thought while looking up at Nirupama and replying, "I understand."

Nirupama grinned broadly at that answer. Her smile was like flowers blooming. However, her smile was gradually warped by a dark aura.

Cordelia drew back slightly. *What's wrong with you today, Oba-sama?*

However, such a Cordelia didn't even enter Nirupama's eyes as she continued to laugh while her shoulders were shaking.

"Just you wait, Countess Halluci. The rumour of the 『dark future of the hard-headed Weltoria』 will be gone by me bringing this cute angel with me. Fufufufufu."

Nirupama also seemed to have her own reason, but Cordelia didn't have the guts to ask about them. Her beauty as a lady disappeared and she was resembled a Demon Queen, so it was high-risk to ask her now. Curiosity killed the cat..... It wasn't like that, but there was no reason for her to touch on such a dangerous topic.

(The Countess Halluci who angered Oba-sama by calling her hard-headed was also a big-shot, huh..... I don't think she's hard-headed in the first place.)

How the heck does Nirupama-obasama act normally? Cordelia wondered while maintaining her smile. *I can't ask and I can't say anything until Oba-sama calms down.....* Cordelia thought, but it didn't take long before Nirupama's expression changed.

"Ah, that's right. Cordelia, you need a dress too, don't you? I've already called the tailor that you always use, so they'll [1] be coming soon."

"Mm, erm..... Oba-sama, didn't you say you didn't have much time.....?"

"Yes. There's no time left since the tailor will come soon. If we drink tea, then we wouldn't be able to consult them about your beautiful dress right?"

"Th-thank you very much....."

Nirupama grinned at Cordelia's reply.

"Let's have them finish the dress in a week. You look like you'll suit red."

She spoke and Cordelia shook her head.

"Oba-sama, I want a light coloured dress."

Red.

Even Cordelia knew that red suited her. It was a colour that the 『Cordelia』 in-game wore beautifully.

However..... It was a bad omen.

Nirupama's eyes widened since Cordelia spoke a little fast.

“Oh my, really? I think red suits you better though..... How about a pink dress with a red corsage? You’ll shine in it.”

“If it’s a corsage, then I’d like to make it with the flowers blooming in the greenhouse on the day. I have this very beautiful rose.”

“Oh my, a rose? How lovely.”

She didn’t have to mention that it was the rose named 『Cordelia』 that she’d received from her friend Gille.

Gille and Cordelia had never met once in the four years, but their letters continued through Vernoux on a regular basis. The letters she received were always courteously written, but there were rare times when they would look like they were rushed. The topics he wrote about varied between studying, sword practice, being teased by Vernoux and books that Cordelia might be interested in.

(I noticed this from the beginning, but he’s a very serious child.)

He seemed to really hit it off with Vernoux, but their personalities were complete opposites. However, it might be because of that that they were good friends.

(I might also want a friend whom I can get along with.)

She might even find that friend at the evening party. If so, then she would be happy.

She strayed a bit off the topic, but Cordelia received permission to use the rose 『Cordelia』 for research purposes from her letter exchanges with Gille. But, of course, she promised to pay a margin if she used the rose for business. Gille was a bit reluctant at that condition and had written that he didn’t need money. Cordelia had insisted but he didn’t accept after all and said that he would give Cordelia exclusive use of the rose instead of a margin. This time, it was Cordelia’s turn to be hesitant because she felt bad, but she yielded to him in the end.

“You need a special rose, don’t you? I’ll be happy if it could be of use to you.”

She couldn’t refuse after he sent that finishing blow.

Nirupama, who didn’t know about Cordelia’s state, smiled and said, “Show me later, okay?”

“Then, the next problem is dancing. Will you be alright? It wouldn’t be as bad as your debut, but the children will be dancing next to you.”

“Please don’t worry, Oba-sama. I have been practising that.”

Her timing wasn’t good enough to show people, but she had been taking dance lessons for a long time now for the sake of her future. Even with triple time, she had been practising since she was young so that people won’t say, 『She can’t dance even though she’s a beauty』. *It’s fine. I should be able to dance.*

“You’re really Elvis’ daughter, no, my niece. You’re cute even if you lack in certain areas..... No, I’m glad you’re a clever kid. I’m happy as the Weltoria feudal lord. ——— I really don’t mind if you want to become my daughter at any time, you know Cordelia?”

Cordelia smiled vaguely in response to her smile. It was a charming offer, but it wasn't something that she could decide by herself, and it wasn't like Nirupama was offering it to her seriously. Rather than it being an original conversation, it was more like a part of their greetings.

"If you really want to be adopted into my family, then I'll give you the education you need as a feudal lord. So you don't have to worry about that. But even if you don't want to become my adopted daughter, I'll give you hints on how to become the 『most cutest Ojou-sama』. So it's alright for you to rely on me."

"Thank you very much, Oba-sama."

"It's actually something my sister should be doing. Though I think that being able to take care of my cute niece is a perk. Elvis also isn't interested in woman's preferences, so it's perfect, right Cordelia?"

Cordelia smiled at Nirupama who was narrowing her eyes and gossiping.

"But, it wouldn't be strange for you to receive invitations from the royal family, since you're so cute, right Cordelia? I don't know what your future brings."

"No, Oba-sama. I think you're just being biased."

"Am I?"

"Yes, I'm sure of it. But that's why I want to improve myself and become a wonderful woman. I'll be turning to you for your guidance."

Of course, she knew that she was cute. She knew, but her aunt's remarks were too ominous. *That future would definitely not come to be*, ——— she wished as she grasped Nirupama's hands.

Nirupama widened her hands a little and then a smile immediately made its way to her face.

"Well, then let's start with a nice dress. The craftsman should be here now."

"Okay."

"Cordelia. First of all, enjoy your first evening party to your heart's content. That's the first step for ladies."

Cordelia nodded deeply at Nirupama's words.

The first thing was to handle her first evening party skilfully. That was her new and immediate goal.

↑1 I'll change the gender once I know it.....

Act 13: The Lady, Thinking

It's hard to overturn an impression someone has of you when you first meet.

When you give a good impression, the gaze pointed towards you would be positive and it would be easier to assess their behaviour as well. However, it would be the opposite if you gave off a bad impression. It takes a lot of work to change doubt into something good. And, if you gave off a 『normal』 impression, one that was neither good nor bad, then the chances for that person to become interested in you decreases, and it is also difficult to change that impression.

“That’s why I also want to leave a good impression……. Now then, what should I do?”

If they only thought of her as a 『Cute Lady』, then it was possible for that impression to change for the worse in the future. It would be a disgrace to the Pameradia House’s name.

Cordelia sighed.

Her room was quiet; it was already late at night and she only had one magic tool lamp lit up. She was in the best environment for thinking, but unfortunately, her thoughts were still scattered.

“What should I do at the Flantheim House’s evening party? I don’t have to be anxious about how I behave because Otou-sama and Oba-sama will be there. But, I’m also anxious because they’re there.”

Earl Pameradia’s daughter.

Countess Weltoria’s niece.

She would certainly be recognised with those two titles. Cordelia was also proud to have those titles. She was glad to have her cool father and lovely aunt.

“But, that’s why I can’t deny the possibility of my impression being weak.”

Of course, the focus of the party wasn’t her. Therefore, her purpose wasn’t to stand out, but to leave her impression with those who she interacted with.

(How will the current me be reflected in the eyes of those who I first meet? It’s important for me to know this.)

When she became an adult at 16, a debut party would be hosted with her as the focus.

Of course, she planned to stand out as much as she could at that time. She wanted to make the most of her appeal, so that she could build a market for balms and essential oils.

(But, if they think of me as an interesting girl from now on, then I might be able to pique their interests more than when I turn 16.)

When she thought like that, then she would have to get psyched up for the evening party.

(It’s also important for me to make acquaintances with those who are the same age as me. I must behave like a lady who wants to make connections with others.)

It was true that Cordelia had no choice but to accept the fact that the only friend she had, who was the same age as her, was Vernoux. Of course, she genuinely wanted friends, but if she didn't make connections then she wouldn't be able to grasp what the other ladies' hobbies and preferences were.

Although the people she knew would increase just by being a lady of the Pameradia House, if they thought she was too normal then they might look down on her. She wanted something that could identify her as an individual.

"My best weapon right now is 『aromas』 after all."

Cordelia suddenly sighed and looked up at the ceiling.

Something that wouldn't cause people to mistake her for someone else.

That would definitely be the variety of aromas she had.

However, she was also unsure about whether she should use it. She could also leave it until she was 16, the age when she'd stand out the most, and spread it all at once. On the other hand, she could present it briefly for now, and let the rumours about it spread before her debut. However, that method made her worry that they would completely forget about it in the four-year gap.

If she introduced a fragrance that was different from the ones she was dealing with now, and they liked it, then she wouldn't have to worry about that.

"Instead, someone might try to contact me in the next four years."

In that case, although I do have some worries, I'll wear a fragrance and attend the evening party for a showdown.

However, another problem arose even if she'd decided to do so. The next problem that was waiting for her was which fragrance she should use. Of course, the balms and perfumes that she'd already made weren't bad, and the experiments for them were already complete, so she didn't have to worry.

But, on the other hand, there was a fragrance that Cordelia wanted to use, no matter what.

It was the rose.

Cordelia wanted to leave the impression that roses were 『her scent』. It was her most favourite fragrance. However, if she wanted it, then there would be a big problem. It was difficult for her to obtain enough 『Cordelia』 to use for various experiments. There were a lot of seedlings in the garden and she had the plot of land that she'd borrowed near the mansion, and Gille was being very cooperative, but it was still a new rose, so she couldn't get her hands on as many as she'd like. Gille had also given her many other varieties of roses, but, if possible, she wanted to make a fragrance with 『Cordelia』.

(.... It's just the right season for flowers to bloom. It's possible for me to make otto oil once, if I make it with the dried flowers I've collected up until now. Even if I pass some to be tested, I should still have enough for the evening party.)

However, there was something she was concerned about.

When it comes to roses, she thought that the solvent extraction[1] method could produce better fragrant essential oils than the steam distillation method[2]. But unfortunately, Cordelia had never conducted an experiment using the solvent extraction method before. The only flowers she'd obtained that could be used for that method were roses, and she still hadn't even got her hands on that many roses, so she didn't include them in her experiments.

“Of course, the variety of roses are different from the time when I lived in Japan. The solvent extraction method and the steam distillation method; I don't know which one suits 『Cordelia』 better.”

However, there was still the possibility that she could obtain an even better scent. If she could get a better scent using that method, then she wondered if it was alright for her to leave an impression with the fragrance made from the steam distillation method.

Cordelia moaned. *I'm making this with Gille's help. I don't want to make an incomplete product. But..... I want to use the rose fragrance.*

“..... This is the first introduction. If I can improve the fragrance by the time I'm sixteen, then it might go in a better direction.”

Her target for her future research was to continue searching for organic solvents that were best suited for the solvent extraction method. *But I want to introduce the best results I can now.* She thought that, and stopped hesitating.

Alright, I've finished thinking.

I'll immediately begin making essential oils with the steam distillation method tomorrow.

And Cordelia, who had decided on her own fragrance, was faced with another problem.

That was..... If possible, she wanted her aunt to use some kind of fragrance. As for the options, Cordelia thought that her aunt could use orange perfume. The essential oils obtained from orange, which was squeezed with a centrifuge, had a refreshing scent. It suited her aunt's image. She would have to be careful of UV rays when using orange essential oils, but it should be fine since it was in the evening. In the first place, her aunt wasn't one to irritate her skin by leaving it unprotected. She always protected her skin with a parasol in the daytime. It also had a relaxing effect, so it shouldn't give the user any bad impressions.

“I hope I get a good reply from Oba-sama.”

Her aunt knew a lot about fashion and she shouldn't be opposed to trying new things. Therefore, Cordelia thought that she would use the new essential oil as long as she liked the scent. If things went according to plan, then her aunt would surely become a wonderful 『walking advertisement』.

However, that wasn't something that Cordelia could solve by herself; she would only get the answer by asking Nirupama.

“Should I discuss it with her through a letter tomorrow?”

At least she'd decided on a fragrance, and Cordelia stretched lightly.

She could finally begin on her last problem.

Yes, ——— Vernoux’s birthday present.

“If I have to get him one, then the flashier the better.”

Something that Vernoux and everyone else in the venue would be happy about, ——— that was the extent of her goal.

Cordelia got up and pulled out some jewel-like things from the drawer next to her bed. Then, she laughed.

“Prepare yourself, Vernoux-sama. I’ll surprise you.”

↑1 absolute

↑2 otto

Act 14: The Flantheim House's Evening Party

Cordelia put on the dress that Nirupama had chosen for her and let Emina do her hair. Then, she sprayed the rose fragrance onto herself.

“You seem tense, Ojou-sama.”

“..... Do I look that way?”

“Yes. Your face is all stiff.”

Emina said that, just before Cordelia was about to leave the room. She observed her face in the mirror. *Indeed, I might look tense.* She realised that and took a deep breath; then she smelt the soft rose fragrance.

(..... It's alright. I can do it.)

She confirmed her appearance once again, and then went to the salon where her aunt was waiting.

“Looks like your preparations went well, Cordelia.”

“Yes, it's all thanks to Nirupama-obasama's lovely dress.”

“Fufu, you've said something really pleasing, but the dress is only shining because the raw materials are good, you know?”

Nirupama, who had already finished getting ready, greeted Cordelia in high spirits. Nirupama was wearing a dark green dress. The design was relatively calm, but when Nirupama wore it, she added appeal to the dress. She probably dresses well.

Then, Nirupama put her hands on Cordelia's shoulder.

“Ufufu..... I'll show you this angel.....”

Those words were probably towards a certain countess, whom she'd mentioned the other day. Nirupama was muttering in a voice that sounded like she was cursing someone. Of course, Cordelia pretended that she didn't hear it. Besides, Nirupama only acted like that for a second.

“It's a nice fragrance, isn't it? It's like you're in a garden.”

“Thank you very much. Oba-sama, you're also using perfume.”

“Of course. It's a present from my cute niece, after all. I didn't think you would make something like this.”

Nirupama was wearing the gentle orange fragrance.

The scents mixing together while they were near, ——— in order for that not to happen, Cordelia had adjusted the essential oils, to some extent, while they were being refined. She had devised them so that the fragrances would only mix lightly with others, and not too strongly, when they got within a certain distance of each other. She could faintly smell the other person's fragrance and there was no discomfort.

Nirupama looked at Cordelia again and muttered in satisfaction.

“But if you had told me sooner, then I would have made an orange dress..... How should I say this, I wonder if they’ll laugh at me for not dressing my age.”

“If it’s Oba-sama, then you’ll suit dresses in any colour.”

“Thanks. Cordelia’s so cute. If you’re troubled over something, you can always rely on your aunt, okay?”

“Thank you very much.”

“So, if you make a new balm, let me try it too, alright? I’ll advertise it for you.”

Nirupama spoke while winking and Cordelia smiled and nodded.

Nirupama’s smile deepened and she suddenly looked at the entrance of the salon.

“I completely forgot. Elvis-sama asked us to meet him at the entrance once we’re ready.”

“Otou-sama did? Has he finished getting ready?”

“It’s better to say that he hasn’t. He came back from the castle and told me he wasn’t going to change. So, I thought about talking with him in the salon until you came, but I wonder if he thought I was being too noisy. He told me he’d wait at the entrance and left the salon.”

“Is that so?”

“Elvis-sama is really always unsociable; I can’t even imagine him being sociable.”

Nirupama said that, and walked gracefully towards the entrance. She didn’t look like she was rushing at all. So, Cordelia held Nirupama’s hands and sped up.

If Otou-sama is waiting, then we must hurry.

However, Cordelia couldn’t make Nirupama walk faster with her power. Rather, Nirupama was watching her while smiling. On top of that, the servants, who saw them, were watching them warmly. Cordelia thought that her behaviour was surely childish, but she didn’t let go off Nirupama’s hand. Elvis was waiting; she had to get her to pick up the pace. However, Nirupama didn’t change her pace at all.

“We’ve kept you waiting, Elvis-sama.”

“I’m sorry for making you wait, Otou-sama.”

“It’s fine.”

Elvis replied briefly at what Nirupama and Cordelia said. Like Nirupama had stated earlier, Elvis was unsociable today. Rather, Cordelia felt that he was a little grumpy.

(I heard he’s busy at work, I wonder if he’s tired.)

Or was he tired of talking to Oba-sama, like she’d said he was. Or did he think it was troublesome to go to the Flantheim House today?

I don't know why he's in such a bad mood, but if the answer lies within one of the things I guessed, then I guess it can't be helped. Cordelia decided to visit him with a hot compress after they returned from the evening party.

But in contrast to Cordelia, Nirupama looked like she didn't mind at all.

"Anyway, look at Cordelia. Isn't she cute?"

"....."

Elvis responded with silence to Nirupama's lively voice.

Even if it was Cordelia, Elvis had never complimented her before, by calling her cute or anything like that, so if that did happen, then she thought that her heart would jump in surprise. *It's enough that he didn't say I don't suit it.* She thought that, but Nirupama pointed her right index finger at Elvis and gave him some advice.

"Elvis-sama, even if it's embarrassing, you should compliment women when it's necessary. Please understand a woman's heart."

"....."

"Hey, Elvis-sama. Can't you tell your daughter that she's 『cute』?"

"Oba-sama, that's enough....."

It was pointless to press Elvis while he was expressionless and not talking..... Or rather, Cordelia felt sorry for him. Humans had their fortes and weaknesses, so it was pointless to try and force someone to say something.

"You look nice in it, at least."

Even though he had said it in a mechanical voice, Cordelia doubted her ears, since some unbelievable words came out of his mouth. Elvis, the person in question, turned his back and started walking after saying, "Let's go."

"Argh, Elvis-sama! Just say 'you look nice'!! What do you mean by 'at least'?"

Well, such a trifling thing didn't matter to Cordelia.

(..... Otou-sama complimented me!)

It was inevitable that she felt amazed rather than impressed. However, it wasn't like she wasn't happy. The corners of her mouth rose up naturally. She followed Nirupama and boarded the carriage.

Nirupama talked a lot inside of the carriage, too. She talked about different sweets and fashions, and Cordelia found them really interesting, though Elvis didn't seem like he was listening at all. In rare cases, Nirupama would ask Elvis something and he responded with only three words: "Yeah," "No," and "I don't know."

(..... His interactions with Oba-sama are exactly like with Marquis Flantheim.)

I certainly feel that the way they talk to Elvis is somewhat similar. If so, then it's no wonder Otou-sama's replies are the same..... Does Otou-sama have something that attracts lively people?

The carriage, with the three inside, arrived at the Flantheim residence while she was thinking.

The Flantheim residence was a white mansion, and it looked like it had been cut out from a part of the castle. The Flantheim mansion was bigger than the Pameradia mansion, but the garden was smaller.

(It's a mansion.....)

Her own residence was also a mansion, but she was surprised at the different atmosphere it gave off.

(Vernoux-sama, you're really a Marquis' son aren't you.....)

Of course, it wasn't like she doubted that, but she would feel strange if she heard that Vernoux, who suited the word capricious, lived there.

A lot of people were already gathered for the evening party and everyone was dressed in gorgeous outfits.

Cordelia followed after Elvis and her aunt while listening to the noisy people. Her heart, which should have calmed down when they left the mansion, started pulsing faster.

"Oh my, it's Countess Weltoria. She looks as pretty as always."

"It's rare to see her with Earl Pameradia."

"Is that child the Earl's daughter?"

"She's around the same age as the prince, isn't she?"

Cordelia tried desperately not to tense her face up in that situation, where she became the focus of attention just by walking.

Smile, smiling is important.

It shouldn't be a problem if she just walked quietly with a smile. In fact, Elvis didn't seem like he cared about the rumours and Nirupama smiled with confidence. She couldn't say she got cold feet while looking at the two. She once again straightened her back and looked forward.

Then, she heard a familiar voice.

"Oh! This is a rare combination."

The voice belonged to Marquis Flantheim; Leonard. It seemed that he was walking around the venue.

"I haven't seen you for a long time, Leonard-sama."

"It's been a while since we've met."

Nirupama and Cordelia gave their greetings and the Marquis nodded in satisfaction. Then, he looked over at Elvis, who didn't say a thing.

"Elvis, you seem to be in a bad mood?"

“Oh, the worst.”

“It seems like you have a lot of work to do lately, you must be tired. I thought one of your sons would come in your place today.”

“.....”

The Marquis placed his hand on Elvis’s shoulder with a face that said that he knew that Elvis was attending for his daughter. However, his hand was immediately brushed away, as if Elvis was brushing an insect off his shoulder.

But, the Marquis still had a smile on his face. It was as if to say that he was having fun.

Cordelia saw Nirupama concealing her mouth with her fan and laughing at the exchange between the two.

“Leonard-sama, isn’t Cordelia so cute today?”

Nirupama said as she talked to the Marquis.

“Yeah. She’s so cute that it makes me think that I want a daughter of my own.”

“You won’t.”

(Otou-sama, he’s just saying that out of politeness.)

Cordelia felt reassured from that fast rebuke, and she had a smile on her face as she watched the two talk. Of course, it sounded like a joke from just those words, but for some strange reason it no longer sounded like a joke when Elvis said it. Elvis’s response seemed to have amused the Marquis more.

“That is up to your daughter. There’s a chance for her to become Vernoux’s wife.”

“None.”

(Otou-sama, that’s a joke too.)

Rather, there’s no way it could be anything but a joke, Cordelia thought as she endured and kept the smile on her face. In the first place, something like marriage with Vernoux was impossible unless he changed how he viewed her. Cordelia also didn’t think it was possible and could only say, “What stupid things are you saying?” That was why she could be relieved and think of him as just a friend. It wasn’t necessary for her to worry about it in the first place, but she did hate herself for taking a moment to imagine it, because of the Marquis’ words.

No, nope, it’s impossible.

“But, you’re also beautiful today Countess Weltoria. You should meet Sara later, she’ll be glad to see you after so long.”

He said that and looked towards a beautiful woman exchanging greetings with the guests with Vernoux.

The woman with the same blonde hair as Vernoux was Sara Flantheim. She was Vernoux’s mother and the Marquis’ wife. This was the first time Cordelia had met her, but she knew who she was straight

away. She didn't think they looked like each other, but she could tell that the adult Vernoux had some of her features.

"Oh my, are you leaving all the work to your wife and skipping out, Leonard-sama?"

"No. I just wanted to go greet my close friends. That's why I saw you two earlier."

"How convenient for you. Please greet the guests while Sara and I talk. I can't speak normally with her if I'm getting blocked."

"Women spend a lot of time talking, after all..... But, okay. If that makes Sara happy then I'll do it."

The Marquis started walking towards Sara. Nirupama followed but Elvis didn't move.

"I'm going to go talk over there for a bit."

"Okay. Follow me, Cordelia. You're going to congratulate your friend, aren't you?"

A couple of men with frowns on their faces stood in the direction that Elvis was headed towards. She didn't think they would talk about complicated things, considering the place, but Cordelia concluded that it wasn't something that she should interrupt.

Cordelia walked to where Nirupama was, and they headed towards Vernoux.

"Come to think of it, you're using a very rare scent today. Did you import some rare things?"

"No? I haven't seen them in foreign kingdoms either."

Nirupama immediately answered the Marquis, who was tilting his head in confusion while walking. She looked proud even though her mouth was concealed by the fan. The Marquis immediately understood her expression.

"So, the way to obtain it is a secret?"

"Do you also want to use it, Marquis-sama?"

"No, I thought it would make Sara happy. Don't you think it would make a nice gift?"

"I see. It's certainly nice."

Contrary to his favourable question, Nirupama evaded the answer. He smiled wryly.

"It doesn't seem like you'll tell me that easily."

"For now, that is. But, you'll find out soon."

Cordelia reached her destination while listening to the two talk.

"Sara. Countess Weltoria is here."

"Oh my, Nirupama! I wanted to see you."

"It's been a while, Sara. Thank you for inviting me. I came with my dull brother-in-law and cute niece today."

Cordelia spoke at Nirupama's introduction.

“It’s nice to meet you. I am Cordelia Enna Pameradia. Thank you for inviting me today.”

“You’re exaggerating when you say something like invite. I’m especially thankful that you brought Elvis-sama with you. My husband would sulk if he didn’t come. He was pouting when he heard that Elvis-sama wouldn’t come because he was busy.”

Sara spoke jokingly and stared at Cordelia while narrowing her eyes.

“Cordelia-san, I’m so happy to meet you. I’ve heard a lot about you from my husband and Vernoux. Thank you for getting along with Vernoux.”

But, the person in question, her son, said disgruntledly.

“..... Mother. That expression is a little...”

“Oh my, are you embarrassed?”

Cordelia, at least, didn’t think he sounded embarrassed at all. If his mouth spreading in a thin line was him being embarrassed, then his embarrassment was a little disappointing.

However, Sara’s heart-warming aura didn’t change. Probably because her aura was soft. The guests were mostly under the Marquis’ care, but the ladies weren’t far away from Sara.

On the other hand, Cordelia felt that the ladies’ gazes were more focused on Nirupama than Sara.

(Their attentiveness is very high.)

It was an evening party hosted by the Flantheim House, so it wasn’t strange if Sara and the Marquis received everyone’s attention. However, if Nirupama received more attention than them, then that just went to show how much the ladies couldn’t keep their eyes off her. Cordelia didn’t doubt it but, Nirupama being in the lead at fashion wasn’t just an exaggeration. And, if she drew that much attention then the people around them could probably hear what they were talking about. So, they couldn’t talk much about their interests and preferences there, since it would be widely known.

Of course, that was certainly because Nirupama stood out, in the first place, and she had the power to make those around her want to imitate her.

Amidst that, Sara met Cordelia’s eyes and tilted her head in confusion.

Cordelia widened her eyes because such a cute action was being performed by a woman with a calm aura.

“What’s wrong, Sara-sama?”

“Cordelia-san, you’re very unusual, aren’t you?”

“Unusual, you say?”

“Yes, the scent of flowers. Nirupama is also emitting a nice smell.”

Cordelia felt as if the people around them toned down their voices at Sara’s question. Then, they all turned to look at Nirupama.

Nirupama is keeping a secret, that was what they were thinking.

Nirupama put the fan to her mouth.

“Are you interested in it, Sara?”

“Yes. Because Cordelia-san smells like she’s in a flower garden. Of course, I also like Nirupama’s refreshing scent. It’s a citrusy smell.”

“You’re right.”

“But, it’s not like you’re wearing orange juice and she’s not covered in flowers either, right?”

Sara moved her body and confronted Nirupama.

Nirupama removed the fan from her mouth and grinned. The answer that Nirupama muttered while having everyone’s attention on her was simple.

“It’s a secret.”

Sara and the surrounding people’s eyes widened at that sentence.

However, Nirupama immediately continued, “But,

“It won’t be a secret if Cordelia says it’s alright to tell you, Sara.”

“If Cordelia-san does?”

“Yes. This child is very smart, and she is my niece who has a promising future. She’s also familiar with beauty products, you know?”

Nirupama placed her hand on Cordelia’s head as she said that. Cordelia knew that the surrounding ladies were holding their breaths from this conversation.

The grin stayed on Nirupama’s face as she turned her gaze at Cordelia, and Cordelia knew what she was aiming for.

Nirupama didn’t answer the Marquis when he’d asked because she was looking for the most opportune time to do it.

And she was trying to give Cordelia the advantage. Nirupama’s declaration sounded like she was recognising Cordelia for her talents. More than anything, by announcing this with Cordelia’s permission, she was spreading Cordelia’s network.

“..... Aunt is mean. There’s no reason for me to keep a secret from Vernoux’s mother.”

Sara widened her eyes in surprise at Cordelia’s words and then rubbed Vernoux’s head over and over again.

“I’m glad that I’m Vernoux’s mother.”

“Mother, please stop. My hair’s getting messy.”

“Oh my, are you embarrassed?”

“But, Sara-sama. I’ve only just started my research. Therefore..... This is a secret between the three of us, Sara-sama, Nirupama-obasama and me.”

“Of course, if that’s what you wish Cordelia-san. Let’s have a secret tea party next time with Nirupama, just the three of us.”

“Mother, my hair’s getting messy so please stop.”

Vernoux said it again, but Sara’s hands didn’t stop so, he forcibly stopped it with his right hand.

“Oh my, Vernoux has gotten really strong. I’m happy.”

“..... I’m glad you’re happy.”

“Cordelia-san, let’s decide on the date of the tea party next time.”

“Yes, I look forward to it.”

Sara, who proposed that with a smile, was genuinely happy. This was the most favourable development for Cordelia. Therefore, she immediately forgot about her pity for Vernoux, who was fixing his hair.

“Isn’t that nice, Cordelia?”

“Yes. I’m very happy.”

Not only Cordelia, but Nirupama was also in a good mood.

(Well, of course.)

Of course, I think that Oba-sama is happy for me. However, it wasn’t like this had nothing to do with Nirupama at all.

『If you want to know the secret behind the fragrance then ask Cordelia』

Just by saying that, it was impossible for people, who had nothing to do with Cordelia, to quickly ask her about it. Even if Nirupama recognised Cordelia, she was still a child and she had very few chances to appear in public. Like that, a lot of nobles would probably ask Nirupama to introduce them to her.

(If it’s like that, then things would work out well for Oba-sama too.)

But then, it also worked well for Cordelia if they went through Nirupama. No matter how much of a chance it was to broaden her network, the amount of information she had on people was too small. It was better for Nirupama to choose people who took precedence over others. Nirupama had more knowledge than Elvis about women’s society.

(But, they’re reacting more to it than I thought they would.)

She’d thought that it would be easier to spread the aroma if she got the interest of the Marquis and his wife, who were close to the Royal Family, but she didn’t think that it would attract that much attention.

(I might have sown more seeds than I thought I would.)

However, if I arrange the stage like this, then I’ll have to complete a product that would measure up to their expectation.

(I have to be more fired up.)

“I also have to get psyched up.”

Sara uttered the same thing Cordelia was thinking.

Cordelia looked up at Sara in surprise.

“It’s my first time entertaining such a cute guest. I’m looking forward to it.”

“I’ll prepare a lot of sweets,” she said, and Cordelia was relieved. She thought that her own thoughts had been unintentionally transmitted to Sara.

(But, I can’t believe that Sara-sama is going to prepare a lot of sweets for me.)

The reason why Vernoux often came to the Pameradia mansion was because 『he couldn’t eat sweets at home』. That reason was surely because Sara didn’t like sweets. Therefore, she was super happy.

She built up a lot of expectations and achieved one of her goals for the day.

“So, mother will be preparing sweets? I’m really jealous of you.”

“Vernoux-sama. Happy birthday.”

“Thanks. I thought you’d forgotten.”

Vernoux, who shrugged as he said that, turned to face Sara.

“Mother, I will leave for a bit. Dilly, can you come with me for a bit?”

“Huh? Yes. But I want to give you your gift before we leave.”

Cordelia said that and held out her right hand that was clasped tightly. She opened it when Vernoux peeped at it curiously.

There were a lot of seeds in her hand. The seeds were oval and shone like jewels.

“Dilly, this is..... Are you telling me to grow them?”

“I did think you would enjoy that, but you wouldn’t be surprised, now would you?”

Cordelia said as she threw the seeds at the ceiling. The seeds shone more brightly in the light.

“What are you doing.....?”

“Please wait a moment.”

Vernoux said that one sentence, while surprised, and Cordelia raised her hands and concentrated magic onto her fingertips. Then she fired it at the seeds.

The shining seeds popped and opened. At the same time, a number of flowers began floating in the air. The people around leaked out a shout of joy at the flowers which suddenly appeared.

“This is?”

“Were you surprised? It’s a wandering flower that blooms from magic.”

“Did you make it, Dilly?”

“It’s a bit of an exaggeration to say that I made it.”



Originally, this flower was a vine-type plant that crawled across the ground. It wasn't uncommon in the Pameradia fief, but it wasn't a flower that would likely appear in the Royal Capital.

"Can I hear about this trick?"

"This flower was originally a vine-type plant, but it only accepts magic as nourishment. It doesn't need water or light, and they grow roots and leaves just by sucking up magic. So instead, I gave it my magic."

"Plant growth is a specialty of the Pameradia's after all. Why is it floating?"

"Originally, this flower drifts in the air for a few seconds after it's separated from the vines. But, if it's forced to grow with a sudden burst of magic, just like I've shown you now, then it would float in the air for about a day."

When she was 10, she found out that there was a strange flower in their fief, and from then on, Cordelia messed with the flower many times in order to practice her magic. Last year, she realised that it floated in the air for a long time, and she decided to practice blooming a lot of seeds at the same time, so that she could show it at the evening party.

I'm glad I made it in time, Cordelia was relieved.

"Of course, Vernoux-sama would probably be unsatisfied with just this, so I've also prepared another gift for you."

"This is already entertaining enough, but I'm thankful for your gifts. By the way, what is it?"

"It's an assortment of sweets. I've chosen sweets that would last for days."

"I see, you're very thoughtful. Anyway, are you thirsty, Dilly?"

"Huh? Thirsty?"

Cordelia was surprised by the abrupt topic change. To be honest, she wasn't thirsty, but then she remembered that Vernoux had tried to leave a while ago.

(..... I wonder if he got bored with greeting people.)

Then, should I help him out?

Cordelia replied briefly, "Yes, I am." Then she looked up at Nirupama, who winked at her. *It seems like Oba-sama doesn't mind if I leave.*

Then, Vernoux left first and beckoned her to follow, "This way."

"It was a really unexpected present. I've never seen anything like that before."

"Did it make you happy?"

"Yes. Mother too, see look. She's still trying to touch the flowers. There are people touching the flowers throughout the venue as well. It feels like the atmosphere has gotten lighter."

"But, you're happier about the sweets, aren't you Vernoux-sama?"

“Well, forgive me for that.”

Cordelia shrugged at Vernoux because his tone didn’t sound like he was sorry at all.

“But, I’m sure he certainly regrets not being able to see this.”

“He?”

“Yeah. Dilly, what do you want to drink? Juice, right? Here, take this. We’re going over there.”

“Eh? Wait a minute.”

Vernoux forced the drink that he’d gotten from the waiter onto Cordelia and kept walking. Then, he went out onto the balcony. Cordelia didn’t understand what was going on and was hesitant to turn back, so she just followed after him.

“Wait, Vernoux-sama. What’s over……?”

“There’s someone waiting here.”

“Huh?”

Cordelia doubted his statement and looked where he was looking.

The first thing she understood was that someone was standing there.

That person was looking at Vernoux while leaning against the wall. Moreover, that person had brown hair and he was about the same height as Vernoux.

“See, Gille. I brought her.”

Vernoux said while laughing.

“…… Gille-sama?”

No, I know it’s Gille-sama. Vernoux said his name after all.

“It’s been a while, Dilly.”

“Yes, it’s been a long time.”

Cordelia delayed her reply in front of Gille, who had grown up while still having some of the features he did when he was 8. Just like before, Gille was covered in Vernoux’s magic.

(We’re not in town, so why is he in disguise?)

She was more surprised than in doubt when that crossed her mind.

“You’ve become handsome.

“…… Huh?”

Yes, Gille had become very handsome.

That might have had a lot to do with how calming his atmosphere was, compared to four years ago. However, he really did grow up handsomely. She felt like she would stare at him for a time if she was careless.

“Pffft, sa-saying something like Gille is handsome..... Dilly really says odd things after all.”

“..... Vernoux.”

“Aren’t you glad, Gille? Then, I’ll be going back inside. Don’t be too late, Gille.”

Vernoux said that as he left. Cordelia felt like the word ‘amusing’ was written on his back.

“.....”

“.....”

(What should I do.....?)

That was the number one thing that came to her mind after Vernoux left. She hadn’t expected to see Gille at all. It wasn’t like she didn’t want to see him, but she didn’t know what to talk about at all.

(Even though I’ve been exchanging letters with him..... It’s a little different when we actually meet.)

What should I do? What to do?

But, she faced down a little just like that and recalled what she wanted to say when she saw the flower at her chest. She had written about it in the letter, but she had yet to give her gratitude in person.

““Mm.””

However, Gille also talked at the same time Cordelia had made up her mind. They stopped moving and spoke at the same time.

“Thank you very much for the flowers.”

“No, I’m happy they were of use to you. You also got good results from them, didn’t you? I smell a very nice scent coming from you, Dilly.”

“It’s thanks to Gille-sama. Thank you very much.”

“That..... Mm.....”

“Is something wrong?”

“You’ve gotten very beautiful. You were also beautiful when you were 8, but I’m surprised to see you so grown up.”

“Y-you flatter me! But, thank you very much.”

Cordelia lost her words for a second when she got a reply that was similar to the one she’d just given him. He had said it frankly, while looking a little embarrassed, so she couldn’t help but to turn red.

(He’s being sincere, since he looked embarrassed while saying it..... Probably?)

However, he probably thought he had to say it, even though it was embarrassing to say out loud. Therefore, Cordelia thought it would be a little embarrassing to deny his words outright, so she laughed in order to cover it up.

However, Gille didn't seem convinced by her actions at all.

"O-oh yes. When did you decide to come today, Gille-sama? I didn't hear anything about it from Vernoux-sama, so I'm really surprised."

"Huh? Ah, yes..... Sorry, I didn't mean to surprise you. I'd only just found out I would be coming today, just before the party started."

"You seem very busy."

"But, I also have fun. It's not all troublesome stuff."

"Then, I'm glad..... But, please don't overdo it."

Gille, who was diligent, was saying he was busy, so if he had a tight schedule like Elvis's then he could mess with his health.

He's still a child, Cordelia thought and Gille made a serious face.

"I am being careful. But, there are things that I want to do and things that I have to do, so I want to do the best I can."

"Then, please don't push your limits. Promise, okay?"

Cordelia said that and held out her right little finger.

When she stuck out her little finger..... She suddenly realised,

Did pinkie promises exist in this world? She had never seen anyone in her house do it. Cordelia glanced at Gille and his eyes were widened in surprise.

(I wonder if he thinks I'm doing something strange.....!)

When she thought about how to cover this up, Gille's little finger wrapped around Cordelia's.

"Gille-sama?"

"Yeah, I promise!"

Apparently, pinkie promises did exist in this world. She squeezed their little fingers together while feeling relieved and then let go off his little finger.

"But, I didn't think you knew about the crossing of fingers, Dilly."

"Huh?"

"It's a way to make a vow that children in town use to make promises, isn't it?"

(..... I didn't know that. I also didn't know that it was called 'the crossing of fingers'.)

“At first, I was surprised to hear that the origin of it was to imitate knights, who made vows, by crossing their swords together. They imagined that their finger is the sword. But, it’s a very good method to make promises, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I think so too.”

“I promised Dilly, so I won’t overdo it.”

“Okay.”

“So, I want you to promise that you won’t overdo it too, Dilly.”

“Yes, of course not.”

Then, they faced each other and laughed. They’d both realised that the tension they felt at the beginning was gone. In the first place, they’d been exchanging letters for the last four years. The person in front of her slowly overlapped with the one she’d been exchanging letters with, so there was no reason for her to remain anxious.

Cordelia put the glass that she was holding in her right hand to her mouth. She was thirsty now. The juice was quite sweet, but it moistened her throat.

“Oh my, the music.....?”

“Oh, it seems like the dancing has begun.”

The slow tune of the music flowed from within the hall. That was the first time Cordelia had listened to live music played by a large number of people. She became curious and stepped towards the hall.

However, she didn’t move more than one step, because Gille had grabbed her right wrist.

“What’s wrong? Gille-sama.”

“No, well.....”

Cordelia couldn’t imagine that Gille would do something like that without a reason. Cordelia tilted her head curiously as she looked at Gille. He seemed a little lost for words, but he let go off her wrist and once again held out his hand.

“Dilly, I have a request.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Would you dance a song with me here?”

Cordelia was surprised at those words.

Here?

Gille asked once again, “You can’t?” as her eyes flickered.

“No, it’s not like I can’t..... But, I’ve never danced with anyone besides my teacher, you know?”

“Then, I’ll be your first dance partner..... If you don’t mind it being me?”

“Of course, I don’t..... But, I might step on your feet, you know?”

Even though, Cordelia didn’t intend to do something as bad as step on his feet, but she’d never imagine that her first dance would be on a balcony. Whether it be a hall or a balcony, she should be able to dance, but she was a little anxious.

Gille bowed respectfully at Cordelia.

“It’s my pleasure, Ojou-sama.”

Cordelia couldn’t help but laugh at his theatrical appearance.

“I’ll be following your lead, Shinshi-sama. [1]”

She put the glass in her left hand onto the railing and took his hand.

Gille must have been accustomed to dancing, because he made her feel like she wouldn’t step on his feet at all, and it was refreshing to see him have a happy expression on his face, which was completely different from the one her teacher wore when they taught her.

“I never dreamt that I would dance under the stars.”

“Me too. I did hear from Vernoux that you might be coming, but I didn’t know for sure at that time.”

“Oh my, really?”

“Yeah. I found out that you would be coming when I got here. Therefore, I never would have imagined that we would be dancing together.”



He gave the juice on the railing to Cordelia as he said that.

She looked up at the stars and drank the juice.

“Dilly, do you like stars?”

“Eh? Yes.”

She was asked that as she stared absent-mindedly at the sky, and Cordelia was surprised. However, Gille’s words continued before she’d even had time to think about it.

“Then, let’s go to Star Falling Hill one day; I’ll show you around.”

“Star Falling Hill?”

“Yeah. Not many people know about it, but you can see a lot of shooting stars there. It’s very beautiful. The white flowers there are also beautiful.”

“A white flower?”

“Yeah. I’m sure you’ll like it. I really want to talk to you about it now, but I have to go back soon. I’ll send you a letter again. Thanks for today.”

“Eh, huh.....? What?”

She’d thought that he’d go home after returning to the hall, but he put his hands on the balcony and jumped off. It was the second floor.

She was surprised and immediately leaned on the railing to look down.

He was already gone.

(I’m so surprised that he left so abruptly.)

Cordelia was dumbfounded at how he’d bolted out of there.

She also wanted to talk to him a little more, since they finally got to meet. It had been four years since they’d last met, after all.

(..... But, I didn’t expect to see him today, so I’ll probably be able to meet him suddenly again.)

And, he had invited me out, even though he’d only mentioned it in passing. So, he’ll probably contact me sometime soon. She thought that, and slowly headed back into the hall. Elvis and Nirupama were probably worried about her, since she’d been gone for a while.

Cordelia returned to the hall and the first person she saw was Nirupama. She was dancing in the middle of the hall. And when she glided her gaze over a little, she saw Elvis talking to the Marquis.

(What should I do?)

I can’t go to where Oba-sama was dancing, and it was difficult for me to go to where Otou-sama is because he’s talking. Then, I should find a friend who’s the same age as me. Cordelia thought that and suddenly looked around.

(It’s difficult to call out to a child I don’t know..... I wonder where Vernoux-sama is.)

She thought that as she looked for the blonde hair child, but she saw someone unexpected and froze.

(Why is he here.....)

She saw a single boy.

He was the same height as Vernoux. His hair colour was black, and his eyes were golden. And, he had the Royal family crest on his chest.

(Why..... Seriously, why is the prince here?)

The prince was certainly not there when she left the hall. Her mind froze, and she broke out in cold sweat. Cordelia instinctively stepped back.

No, it wasn't strange if she thought about who Vernoux's friends were. But, she never thought that the prince would visit the Flantheim House.

(Yeah..... It's not impossible for the prince not to leave the Royal Castle.)

She had been completely unprepared. She had thought that it would be a little later until she met the prince.

(Calm down, me. I've seen him, but he hasn't seen me yet.)

It's not like he's talked to me or anything. He's the prince. It might be considered rude to talk to a lady that you don't know.

Then, I'll go back to the balcony and quietly wait for time to pass.

Cordelia thought that, and decided to behave in a way that wouldn't get her noticed by the prince. *I'm not even that close to him. It's not strange for him not to notice me.*

But Cordelia's thoughts were instantly shattered.

"Dilly, over here!!"

It was impossible for her to say that she didn't hear Vernoux call for her when his voice had been so loud. Of course, she could pretend that she hadn't heard him, but it was Vernoux, so he would probably call out to her in a louder voice.

(I wanted to escape.....)

Cordelia, whose retreat was cut off, slowly approached Vernoux. If she looked at the people around him carefully, she could see a few knights that weren't there when she'd arrived.

(It's really hard to be a prince, isn't it?)

Cordelia pull her heavy feet forward one step at a time as she pitied the prince. Then, she noticed that those golden eyes were on her and stopped at once.

"Dilly."

"Yes?"

Vernoux urged and she bowed respectfully at the black-haired Prince.

“It is very nice to meet you, Your Highness. I am Elvis Pameradia’s daughter, Cordelia Enna Pameradia.”

I only said the minimum of what I need to and yet, have I ever been this nervous?

However, I have to be as ordinary as possible in front of this prince. Don’t leave a good nor a bad impression.

She had been given the opportunity to introduce herself, so she couldn’t leave unless she got a response.

(Hurry, hurry up and reply.....)

In fact, not much time had passed, but she felt that a lot of time had passed since she’d introduced herself. She could even hear her heartbeat. It was much faster than normal.

“Please raise your head.”

“Yes.”

“I’m not the prince of this kingdom today, but a friend of Vernoux’s. You don’t have to be so respectful.”

Cordelia slowly lifted her face when the prince said that.

Then, her eyes met with the prince who had droopy and gentle eyes.

(The reply I wanted wasn’t something gentle like that.)

And it was impossible to tell the prince, who had just said that, “Nice to meet you.” Of course, she couldn’t say that for another reason as well.

However, there was something that she was glad to know now that she’d met him face-to-face.

(I won’t get jealous even if the prince and heroine love each other. The prince was certainly good-looking, but that’s all of what I think.)

If so, then she wanted to send a big bouquet to the heroine and prince in gratitude.

No, of course she knew. No matter how aware of him she was, she wouldn’t say, “Kyahh, Prince-sama is so cool!”

That was fine. Even supposing that the Cordelia in the game had selfishly showered this prince with affection, it still had nothing to do with her **current** self. If she could stay away from the prince as she’d been doing, then she could live a peaceful life.

(If I’m not jealous, then I can become friends with him..... I wouldn’t think something like that. I wouldn’t be able to keep calm because it’s too ominous.)

Then, what should I do?

Her first priority was to escape from the uncomfortable feeling. She didn’t know what the prince was thinking, but he smiled at her, so she smiled back. But then in that next moment, she thought, *what are*

you doing, me.....!! And did her best to restrain herself. She made excuses to herself that it was an act of God.

But her troubles were easily resolved.

“It has been a long time, Your Highness.”

“Mm? Ah, yeah.”

A cute voice was heard from beside Cordelia. Then, the cute lady, who suited that cute voice, began to praise the prince immediately, “Your clothes are very lovely today.”

(Is this a blessing from heaven?)

Cordelia quickly bowed at the same time she’d thought that, and left the battlefield. She felt the load in her heart lift.

Now, what should I do? Cordelia thought, but she was immediately surrounded by little ladies, and the tallest lady in the group called out to Cordelia.

“Cordelia-sama, it’s nice to meet you. Would you like to talk over there?”

“Yes. Thank you very much.”

Cordelia replied even though she was surprised, and the little ladies cheered. She understood that she was welcomed. She also seemed to have been able to blend in well with them.

Cordelia tried to turn back once as she had been invited by the ladies. She wasn’t trying to look at the prince. She just wanted to say goodbye to Vernoux, who had called out to her, with her gaze. However, she got a bad feeling as she was doing that and only managed to turn her body halfway before looking straight ahead again.

(..... Let’s not. It’s Vernoux-sama, after all. He won’t mind.)

Rather, it would be troublesome for the current Cordelia if she turned back and people thought that she was interested in the prince. So now, she changed her mind and decided to enjoy her time with the cute ladies, since her goal was to make friends of the same generation.

↑1 Gentlemen, opposite of Ojou-sama

Intermission 01: The Prince's Close Friend

"Say, Gille. Dilly might be coming to my next evening party, but will you come?"

It was a fine afternoon when I asked Gille this question.

Gille blinked his eyes in surprise at my sudden question, but it seemed that he immediately understood what I was saying.

"It's almost your birthday, isn't it Vernoux? Congrats."

"It's still too early."

"But it's rare for Dilly to go out in public."

"I heard that Countess Weltoria told mother that she would be bringing Dilly along with her. Earl Pameradia also has to agree, so I can't say for certain that she'd come. Well, even if Dilly doesn't come, I thought that 『Prince Sylvester』 would come incognito."

I said that and Gille laughed, "It's still too early to talk about it, but thanks."

He was laughing, but he was probably a little nervous. This was his first chance to appear in front of Cordelia as 『Sylvester』. Although I feel sorry for Gille, I don't think a conversation between 『Sylvester』 and her would get lively. Because that was how much she has been avoiding him so far.

It would be better for Dilly to meet 『Gille』 before she meets 『Sylvester』. She would probably be so dejected from meeting 『Sylvester』 that she wouldn't be able to talk much to Gille when she meets him, because of that tension. Well, that's only if she comes.

"But, you're going to be 13 soon, aren't you Vernoux. I'm always jealous that your birthday comes so early."

"Our birthdays aren't that far apart."

"I know. But, I'm still a little bit jealous. It's not fair."

Even if he says it's unfair, it's not like I can do anything about it. Incidentally, he's never thought this way before. I can't agree with him. I've never known what's on his mind since a long time ago, then I noticed.

"..... Speaking of, hasn't it been eight years since we've met?"

"You're right."

Both Gille and I never noticed this and we both turned to face each other when we'd realised. And we both began to mutter.

"8 is like half our lives."

"Somehow, it doesn't feel like it."

However, eight years for a 13 year old was a long time.

◆◆◆◆◆

I was five years old when I met 『Prince Sylvester』 .

I'll be honest, I never thought about wanting to go to the castle.

Of course, it wasn't like I wasn't interested in the castle, there was no way I wouldn't be interested in a building that was built like a large secret base. However, at that time, I'd already known that mannerisms existed inside of the castle. I wanted to explore it freely, but I didn't want to go if I had to be obedient and listen to what the adults said. The building was amazing and it was hard for me to hold back.

But heartlessly, a letter inviting me to the castle arrived. To summarize, it said this, 『You might be a candidate for the Prince's schoolmate, so come』 .

My mother and father were happy.

“I hope you can make a lot of friends,” was how they acted, so I couldn't say that I didn't want to go.

But still, they were only calling for school friend 『candidates』 . It felt like it was just for appearances and something similar to an interview was conducted at first. No matter how much they take your parentage into consideration, they would probably be troubled if they let a simpleton stay by the prince's side.

At this time, I was lost for a moment.

I thought that, if I rubbed the other person the wrong way, then I might be able to get far away from this troublesome situation. Basically, I hated troublesome things. But, I immediately gave up on that plan. Here, I got a strange answer and thought that it would also be troublesome if father and mother got angry at me when I got home. No, rather than be angry, I had a feeling that they would be strangely worried instead.

As a result, I successfully joined His Highness' group of school friends. Of course, I wasn't happy at all about this.

The work of being his school friend happened once every few days, and I would study with His Highness and a few other children who were selected.

I somehow knew that this was a great honour. However, I, who was five at the time, didn't think that it was wonderful that my free time was suddenly restricted. Of course, adults would probably think of this as a chance to make personal connections, but unfortunately, I was still a child. Moreover, I was the son of Marquis Flantheim, who created relationships based on whether he liked or disliked them and not through calculated means. There was no way I could devote myself to such a trivial thing..... Well, but I can't deny that I was happy to have a friend.

The classroom learning of the study sessions mainly consisted of debut training. The practical skills consisted of taijutsu, sword training, and basic magic practice..... Well, even if I say that, it took a few years for us to actually have those classes. When we were younger, we played games together, commented on each other's artworks, drew, and did things like exercise.

The first impression I got of His Highness was 『he seems very mature』 . He would often look up at the sky during our breaks. He was also meek. He didn't throw tantrums even if he lost against someone, and he rarely made conversation with others. He was quite absent-minded.

On the other hand, I soon understood that he hated to lose. At first, His Highness would often lose in games and he wasn't very athletic. However, that was really just at the beginning.

I would observe His Highness in that way, but it didn't mean that I became friends with him straight away.

I wasn't the only one, the others were the same. At least for the first year, we kept our distance from him.

It wasn't like we wanted to keep our distance from him, but His Highness rarely spoke to us and our social positions were that of retainers. Sometimes, after study sessions, unknown adults would call out to us, 『don't get too use to it』 , they would say. If I had to say, rather than following that advice, I just didn't speak to His Highness because we didn't have the same wavelengths.

Therefore, even after a year, His Highness to me was just 『the prince who only studies with me』 . We were studying buddies who only had minimal contact with each other. That was all.

But even though we had such a questionable relationship, it was naturally conveyed to other people that we were school friends.

“Say, Vernoux-sama. Is it true that you study with Prince-sama? What do you talk about with Prince-sama?”

I would often get asked that when my father took me to the houses of nobles who had a daughter who was the same age as me.

Ah, so is this what 『scouting』 is?

I knew such a word well when I was a child. I honestly thought so. But even if I knew it, I wouldn't say such a big thing out loud. It wasn't like I didn't say it because I was mean to do so.

“His Highness is a quiet person, so he doesn't talk much.”

I've never talked to him or anything before, so it couldn't be helped.

However, the girls were disappointed by my answer. Well, of course they would be.

“Sorry.”

“N-no, yo-you have nothing to apologise for!”

The girls would shake their heads in a hurry whenever I said that and immediately change their expressions.

Was the title of Prince-sama that charming?

Of course, the Royal Family who built this kingdom were worthy of respect. However, I honestly didn't know if His Highness was someone who should be respected. He is hard-working and smart. He wasn't a bad guy either, but the reality is..... normal. I didn't know what His Highness was thinking.

But still, the girls would ask me about His Highness.

Even if Prince-sama is a Prince-sama, he wasn't like the Prince-samas who appeared in picture books. I'm always curious about him because I don't know what he's thinking.

This didn't just apply to me.

"Oh, so it's the same for you as well, Myles?"

"Yeah, but I don't meet as many girls as you, so it's not that bad. I might get asked when my sister grows a bit older, but she's only just turned one, so I don't want to think about it yet."

One day, after a year had passed without us talking much with His Highness, I was talking to Myles, the son of an Earl who was the same age as my father.

We were talking about His Highness and the young ladies. Myles generally agreed with my opinions. Well, the thing about his younger sister was probably a joke. Or, he was a potential sis-con.

"But even if we were to talk about him, everyone's opinions would be different."

"Yeah, you're right."

"Therefore, it might be helpful in situations where you can't lie."

"Well, that's true."

It wasn't like anyone was stealing a march, we were really just 『children who studied together』. I don't know whether spending our days like that was good or bad. However, this was the time when I began to think it was a good thing since I wasn't inconvenienced by it either.

"Oh, it's a cat."

"Cat?"

I saw a white cat walking outside with its tail up on the other side of the trees, outside of the corridor.

"..... I'll go chase it for a bit."

At that time, I couldn't remember why I was so curious about the cat. I was probably interested in seeing something for the first time in a place where I always pass through.

"Vernoux, your parents will get angry if you don't go home soon."

"Father said that he has a meeting today. So, he won't get angry, since he'll be home late anyways."

"Your mother will get angry. My parents will get angry at me so I'm going home now. Don't go too far!!"

"I know!"

I got away from the reluctant Myles and rushed out of the corridor into the garden. The cat didn't change his pace when he saw me, and continued to walk briskly through the garden. I ran and chased after it.

But, I lost sight of the white cat.

"..... I'm sure he was around here."

I've never approached the place with the water fountain. I might have gone further into the castle than I'd thought.

I thought that while still being curious about the cat, so I walked slowly towards that place..... I noticed an unexpected person on the other side of the fountain. He also didn't expect me to show up here.

"Huh? What a coincidence. Meeting in a place like this."

"..... Your Highness."

There stood His Highness hugging the cat in question. The cat yawned.

I thought, *I shouldn't have chased after the cat.*

However, it was impossible for me to leave after His Highness had spoken to me. I was cursing the carefree cat.

"..... Is that cat your pet, Your Highness?"

"Nope. This child is probably from town. He probably came here for a walk."

I, who couldn't think of any common topics to talk about straight away, talked about the cat who was the culprit for this.

The result was that the conversation ended immediately.

"Do you like cats?"

"Huh? I'm more interested in them than liking or disliking them."

"Then, do you want to hold it?"

"N-no. I don't have to go that far....."

The conversation, which I thought had been finished, was dragged out by His Highness. But, I couldn't keep that conversation going either.

To be honest, it was strange. Just like answering a troublesome adult, who was scolding me, I could answer them sensibly, but I couldn't.

Was that simple because the other person is His Highness and I unintentionally cowered.....? No, that shouldn't be it. It's probably because I can't feel any malice nor hostility coming from His Highness.

His Highness smiled wryly at me, who could not answer well.

"I'm sorry, it's boring isn't it?"

“No, I’m grateful for your kindness.”

“No, I’m not talking about now. It’s about the study sessions..... Or rather the break times. You guys can’t talk as you like when I’m around, right?”

I couldn’t keep up with what he was talking about for a moment.

“That is not true.”

“Thanks for your concern. But, I know about it. So, I’m sorry.”

I wonder if he saw it somewhere. It wasn’t like I had no idea where he could have seen us. I talk comfortably with Myles while we walk through the corridors. In the first place, His Highness wasn’t to blame, but if he was really feeling apologetic about it, then it was difficult for me to reply.

However, I also thought that I shouldn’t just nod.

“Your Highness. Everyone who is studying together with you, will one day serve as your retainers.”

“I know.”

His Highness was puzzled by my sudden remark. I also thought, *what are you saying, me*. However, I couldn’t stop what I’ve already started.

Ah, it doesn’t matter anymore, I thought and continued.

“But, we don’t know much about you, Your Highness. So, I have a suggestion. Why don’t you treat everyone to some sweets tomorrow?”

“Treat them to sweets?”

“It’s not like we don’t want to talk with Your Highness. But, we’ve been taught that the Royal Family is different from us. That’s why I thought that it could be a chance for you to get everyone to feel that you are the same as us.”

Honestly, even I thought that this was completely opposite from what I was thinking from a while ago. It wasn’t inconvenient for things to stay as they were, and it wasn’t like I wanted to talk with him.

However, I just didn’t know if we should leave our classmates feeling apologetic for the distance.

His Highness groaned quietly at my words.

“Will things work out with something like that?”

I also thought the same thing. *It’s unbelievable that one or two sweets would shorten the distance that no one could approach at all in this past year*. But, I just couldn’t think of any other proposals on the spot.

“Everyone’s simple-minded. Even now, we have been able to talk for this long because of a single cat.”

Even if it doesn’t work out, there was a possibility that things would progress rather than if he did nothing.

So it'll be fine, ——— I tried to convince myself. And at least, it would eliminate the situation where His Highness thought 『it's my bad』 when he's done nothing wrong.

“Is that so? Then, I'll talk to mother about it.”

If I had to say, it didn't look like His Highness was convinced about it. To put it plainly, it looked like I was pressuring him.

Nevertheless, His Highness treated everyone to a slightly big cookie during break the next day.

Everyone was surprised by this sudden event. And, they only took one cookie each while looking nervous.

The room was strangely tensed.

But, that lasted only for a second. Even if they were timidly eating the cookies, it was too delicious and it was impossible for them to keep feeling nervous once they lost their senses.

That was how delicious that cookie was.

“May I have another one, Your Highness?”

“There’s a lot so it’s fine.”

There were even guys who wanted a second one without hesitation, there were even guys who bit into the cookie and then just stared at it.

His Highness was the focus of the children.

His Highness, who was looking for a reaction from the easy to understand children at first, looked relieved. When our eyes met, I felt like he was trying to tell me something. However, that was interrupted by a somewhat excited voice that was asking him if he liked sweets as well.

But as for me, I did think 『Are these guys going to be alright? They got pulled in by things too quickly』. Well, they were still children and it was a gift from someone they would serve in the future, so it was fine.

I walked to the fountain where I spoke with His Highness on that day after the study session.

His Highness was already there. He was also holding the white cat. His Highness and the cat noticed that I was there at the same time.”

“It went really well, didn’t it Your Highness?”

“Thanks. It’s thanks to you Vernoux.”

He put down the cat who was struggling in his arms and slowly stood up.

“I didn’t know that it wasn’t that hard. Sorry I doubted you.”

“It’s okay. It’s because Your Highness chose a sweet that everyone liked.”

The cookies were probably all gone. They were familiar with it because it was a cookie they’ve all eaten once before. And, I didn’t even think it went well..... I have no intentions on confessing this. His Highness smiled while I was thinking that.

“Then, I should thank mother. But, mother would probably tell me this 『If so, then thank Vernoux』. The one who told me to do it was Vernoux after all.”

“.....”

I don't think he was just awkward, he was probably embarrassed as well. "Your praise is more than I deserve," I had replied, but I was disturbed so the words turned out a little monotone. Nonetheless, His Highness didn't read too much into it.

His Highness began to walk slowly. I felt like he was telling me to follow him, so I slowly met my pace with his. The place where he went to was the garden.

"I've read it in a book before, so I knew about the word 'friend'. But, I didn't know what a friend was and I didn't know if I could make a friend. It wasn't clear to me from reading it in books."

He spoke as he entered the gazebo and sat down. I stood next to him and thought about the meaning of that word.

"..... It is very presumptuous to be friends with Royalty."

I was unwilling to feel sorry for His Highness, but I had the courage to call him a friend. When I said what I had honestly thought, I heard a voice leak from His Highness, "Gah." Then, he tried to hold his stomach and press it down.

"Vernoux, you're interesting, aren't you?"

"Do you think so?"

"Yeah. You're interesting because you say things clearly."

I don't remember saying anything interesting. *What the heck was so funny that he had to hold his stomach?* This continued for a while and then he leaned back and said.

"It's troublesome to be Royalty."

"....."

I thought so too, but I shouldn't agree with him. I can't deny it either. It was a phrase that only gave me trouble. But His Highness didn't want to trouble me nor did he want to make me nervous.

"But, I became friends with Vernoux thanks to that. I should be thankful."

"....."

"Say something."

"I don't know what to say."

Even though I just said I sound presumptuous. Even though His Highness acknowledged that and even said it was troublesome. All I could do was shrug when I thought that.

However, it didn't feel unpleasant. His Highness also laughed.

"Vernoux too, if there's something I can do for you just tell me."

"Your Highness, you shouldn't say something like that so easily. Absurd requests might come your way."

Of course, I didn't mean anything bad by it. I don't know if he was going to take my advice, but I wanted to warn him. However, His Highness tilted his head in curiosity.

"Vernoux, are you going to ask for something absurd?"

"..... I won't."

"Then it's fine, isn't it?"

That wasn't the problem. That was a hindsight-based opinion, even I had the possibility of asking for anything I wanted. But, I didn't need to say it out loud for him to understand this. His Highness' smile didn't fade and he replied.

"It's fine. If you ask for something absurd, then I can just tell you I can't do it. This is only if I can do it..... Oh yes, do you want to climb the east tower together? Something like that? It looked very nice up there."

"Huh, is that alright?"

"Yes."

I accidentally reacted to that unexpected invitation. It was so fascinating that the crease on my eyebrows disappeared.

Wandering around the castle wasn't allowed, but if I looked around the castle with His Highness as my guide, then I wouldn't be criticised.

"You won't be scolded if you're with your friend, right?"

I still think I did it out of self-interest. But if I missed this chance, then I don't think it would appear again.

"Please, Your Highness."

I asked him frankly and he nodded.

Then, we headed straight for the tower. The wind blew comfortably on us as we looked down onto the town. It was very wide and sparkling.

"How is it?"

"It's more than I imagined."

His Highness' voice was swept away by the wind and I couldn't hear it clearly. Also, I don't think my words reached him either, but I couldn't confirm it. I couldn't take my eyes away from the scenery.

"I'm going to be shoulder this kingdom in the future."

The words His Highness muttered while looking down onto the town were also swept away by the wind. However, it miraculously reached my ears. He wasn't talking in a loud voice and I thought they were words that he'd just blurted out. But still, I had heard those words clearly.

Somehow, it might not be bad to support him.

I looked at His Highness' face from the side and thought that I would like to talk to him a little more.

◆◆◆◆◆

After I got the chance to talk to him, we would often hang out together after the study sessions. We never made any promises, but we met in front of the fountain most the time. I wasn't hiding it, but I couldn't tell our classmates that I dared to talk with His Highness. I intended to answer them if they asked about it, but they never did. Still, I was probably able to convey to them that I got along with His Highness. There were no complains. If I had to say it, then I was recognised as a mediation-like existence and they seemed thankful.

However, this was only between the children. There were adults who got into bad moods when they found out I was friends with His Highness.

"The Flantheim son seems to be getting along well with His Highness, but it's important for him to be aware that he's a retainer."

He'd even had adults say that to his face while grimacing. But still, I couldn't just quietly agree with them.

"I have His Highness' good will. It would be rude to refuse it for no reason."

I didn't reply to them with the feeling of 「leave me alone old man」. But, that answer probably caused the rumour of 『Flantheim's child isn't cute at all』 to float around at that time. So, I decided to act more friendly to those around me.

When I did, the rumour quietly died down. See what happens!

Other people noticed this, so naturally, my father also noticed that I was on talking terms with His Highness. To begin with, one of the reasons why he'd noticed was probably because I constantly went home late.

Father asked me happily.

"I hear you've become friends with His Highness. Did you talk with your fists?"

Of course, it was possible that father was joking. I want him to predict that my face would twitch at those outrageous words.

"No. I do speak with him, but that's impossible."

"What?! So, it's not like that. Even if you're a little wild; I wouldn't blame you if you two were able to understand each other. I wonder how many times Elvis and I crossed swords with each other before we understood each other. Well, whether I won or not is a different story."

"Father, I don't have the courage to go wild with His Highness."

I lost sight of the expression I should be making at my father who had recommended such an unusual method. Unfortunately, it was my principal not to fight a losing battle. I don't know if I can beat His Highness, and I don't think I would do something similar to father, who had been beaten several times in the past.

In the first place, there was no way I would go wild with His Highness because it would be too terrifying afterwards..... I honestly thought something like that at the time.

Therefore, I was surprised when His Highness proposed a 『wild』 idea a few days after.

“Vernoux, why don't we explore the castle basement today?”

On that day, His Highness proposed that to me in front of the fountain after our study session.

“The basement, was it?”

“Yeah. It's old, but it's an interesting place with mysterious patterns written on the walls.”

I've explored many places in the castle, but I have yet to set foot in the basement. I didn't even know that the castle had a basement..... No, it makes sense considering how big this building is, but I couldn't imagine what kind of place it could be.

“I want to see it.”

I answered without hesitation, like always. He immediately urged me, “Then, let's go.” He was rushing more than usual, but his attitude wasn't strange enough for me to doubt him.

However, I saw that the adults, who were watching us from afar, also moved when we did. It wasn't surprising that we were seen by someone.

This is His Highness. It wasn't odd for someone to be watching us to make sure that I didn't harm him. Them watching at a distance meant that they trusted me to some degree..... I thought, as we turned the corner and he suddenly pulled my arm. We left the main pathway and I was pushed into a small corridor.

“Your Highness, this isn't.....”

“This way is fine.”

No, it's not. I'm sure the guard turned blue the instant we turned the corner. I don't want to be wild..... I had told my father, but I was caught up in His Highness' mischievous act

However, he didn't slow down.

“It's fine. That person isn't watching me on father's orders. So, it's okay.”

“But...”

“And, I wasn't intending on going to the basement today.”

He said as he proceeded down a path that I knew well. It was the way to the east tower, which I climbed together with him in the beginning.

We went into the tower and ran up to the top. We were both out of breath when we reached the top.

“The wind certainly feels nice up here. We should have brought some sweets up with us.”

“..... We should have.”

“Speaking of which, I haven’t heard this from you yet. Tell me your favourite sweets next time, Vernoux. I’ll prepare some.”

“If possible, I want water more than sweets right now.”

“You’re right. I want to drink some water too.”

Even though he said that, he didn’t have any intentions to immediately climb down the tower. He put his back to the wall, sat down and looked up at the sky.

“We can’t reach the sky from a tower after all.”

“..... Well, it’s closer to the sky than the basement.”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to trick you. I’ll show you to basement next time. But, I didn’t want the adults to hear us talking today. We can’t take our time talking if they are near.”

His Highness said and I sat down next to him. It was bad to speak while looking down on him. Then, I looked at the sky like he was, and I saw the white clouds flowing slowly across the sky.

“..... The sky is certainly high.”

It wasn’t like I really wanted to go to the basement. So I didn’t mind if that was what he wanted. I wasn’t troubled if the adults heard us talking, but I did mind them.

“Have you ever been to town, Vernoux? I’ve only peeked at it from inside of the carriage.”

“The town, was it? Father has taken me there before.”

What does he want to talk about now that we’re away from the adults? I thought and he talked about something that had nothing to do with the sky that he was looking at.

The town.

It’s natural that he’d want to walk around town himself since he sees it a lot from the tower. His Highness mostly went out with His Majesty. He couldn’t go to places that he wanted to. I only walk around town with father, but he’ll usually take me to places I want to go if I tell him about it.

“If possible, can you tell me about your experiences there Vernoux?”

“My experiences?”

“Yeah.”

“You might get a preconceived notion of the town from my personal experience.”

It wasn’t like I didn’t want to tell him. But, I was a little scared of planting a preconceived notion into his mind. Even though we’ve become good friends, His Highness was still His Highness.

However, he continued to stare at the sky without looking at me and laughed.

“But still, there’s no harm in knowing, is there? I also want to see it someday.”

“..... Well, just talking about it is something I can do.

However, I suddenly realised.

Yes, talking about it wasn’t a problem. But what should I do if he says something like, “I want to go incognito with you?” in the future? It suddenly crossed my mind that it would be odd for His Highness, who was smiling, to suddenly say this. But, I was probably thinking too much.

But, well.

If he did want to go, then I probably wouldn’t stop him. Perhaps, when His Highness wanted to do something, he wouldn’t stop even if people tried to stop him. *I had to master how to go incognito first, so that His Highness wouldn’t loiter around.* Because, if I left him alone, then he might wander off somewhere.

“I thought you were a little more mature, Your Highness.”

“I thought that you were a more formal person, Vernoux.”

The first impression we’d left each other was considerably different from how we were. However, we’re lucky that we didn’t both think, “It would have been better if you were.”

Well, I couldn’t imagine that I would be calling His Highness, 『Gille』 two years after that.

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“Vernoux, you’ve been spacing out since a while ago. What’s wrong?”

“Oh, no. It’s nothing.”

I, who was remembering a lot of things, shook my head slightly at the grown-up Gille in front of me.

I wasn’t hiding anything, but I didn’t dare to tell him about it. Rather, I would cause a misunderstanding if I told him straight-up that 「I was thinking about you」 I mean, even I would be put off if I heard it. Well, I’ll be put off a lot by it.

“Say, Gille.”

“Yeah?”

“Do you want to climb the tower again after so long?”

Well, I’m saying a lot with just this.

When I thought that, Gille looked a little confused like usual and then he laughed, “Then, shall we prepare some sweets and water?”

Act 15: The Girl with the Dark Brown Hair

A few days after the Flantheim House evening party.

Cordelia secluded herself up in her laboratory and thought about essential oils.

(A fragrance that Sara-sama would like. A fragrance that Sara-sama would like.)

Three days after the evening party, Nirupama had taken Cordelia out, as if she was kidnapping her, and they visited the Flantheim mansion once again. The Marquees greeted them with plenty of sweets, so Cordelia enjoyed those first. She observed the conversation between Nirupama and Sara, and then showed Sara the essential oils she had, other than the rose one.

“They all smell nice.”

“Are there any you like?”

“Well, I want to try them all, but I just don’t know where to start.”

“I also brought some perfumes and balms that I have. I hope that you would try them also.”

“Thanks. I’m very happy.”

Sara looked as happy as she’d said she was. But then, Cordelia noticed something.

Sara-sama probably doesn’t like all the fragrances here, she just hadn’t found something that’s caught her eye.

She thought that and concentrated her magic in her eyes, and looked at the magic colour that was surrounding Sara. She memorised the hue and thought about what blend would work well for that hue of magic.

(Of course, I’m sure Sara-sama would be happy even if I don’t blend it for her, but it’s worth it if she’s happy.)

For now, Sara could just use the things that Cordelia had given her. She was still thinking of a blend for Sara, but it might have been faster just to listen to her impressions of the ones she had used. However, if she was really to think about blends seriously, then she wanted more kinds of essential oils. *Should I search for more herb habitats in the library?* Cordelia was really troubled over where to start.

(And then..... This has nothing to do with fragrances, but it might be good to change the plain dark reddish-brown bottles into something cuter.)

The colour might not be easy to change, in order to prevent a change in quality, but there are many ways I could make the label. The bottle I’m using now is easy to use, but it’s a bit boring.

Cordelia thought about it as she took a small bottle from the table.

“..... Hey, Ojou-sama.”

“What’s wrong, Ronnie?”

“Aren’t you pushing yourself a little too hard? You’re spending more time on that chair than usual. Why don’t you take a little break?”

Ronnie told her that and Cordelia tilted her head. She had no intentions of pushing herself too hard.

But, she did feel like her shoulders were a little stiff when she moved them. Apparently, what Ronnie had said wasn’t wrong.

(I wonder if I was more distracted from my encounter with Prince-sama than I thought.)

They hadn’t talked that much, and she intended on feeling relieved after she reconfirmed that she’d avoided him, but apparently, she was more aware of him than she had thought she was.

(But, I can’t help it, my life is at stake.)

Will I be reflected in Prince-sama’s eyes as ‘just a normal lady’? She was a little worried about that, but the current her had no way of knowing the answer. Of course, she could find the answer to a certain extent if she asked Vernoux, but then that would cause misunderstandings, and she couldn’t ask when she knew he was probably going to tease her more.

“I’ll prepare some tea. So, please rest for now, Ojou-sama.....”

“Excuse me, Cordelia-sama.”

“Emina? Come in.”

A knock sounded at the door, interrupting what Ronnie had to say, and Cordelia invited the person in.

“You have a guest waiting for you.”

“A guest? For me?”

“Yes. Aisha-sama is here.”

Cordelia quickly stood up at those words. This was the second time Aisha had visited without an appointment. *Is it that urgent that she didn’t even have time to send a letter?* She headed towards the parlour while feeling anxious.

In the parlour, Aisha wasn’t sitting on a chair and instead was staring out of the window.

“I’m sorry for making you wait, Aisha-sama.”

“It’s been a while, Cordelia-sama.”

“What happened?”

She thought that it was a bit hasty for her to ask after the greetings, but was extremely worried, so she asked. Aisha widened her eyes in surprise and said while looking very serious.

“Yes, something big has happened.”

“What on earth.....”

“Well..... I was able to buy the limited custard pie from the store that has the longest queues in the Royal Capital. So, would you like to eat it together?”

“Th-that is certainly a big deal.”

Cordelia thought she was going to stumble for a second there, but that was certainly a big deal.

Cakes had a short shelf life. It was inevitable that Aisha had come without an appointment if she had gotten the cake so suddenly. Cordelia had also heard about the pie from Ronnie and wanted to eat it, but she didn't think she could.

Unfortunately, the queues were just too long. Even though it was spring, the sun's rays were harsh, and Cordelia couldn't say to her servants, “Go queue up and buy this for me.”

Incidentally, Ronnie knew about the pie because the onee-sama's from the magician's wing had ordered him to go buy them some. Then, he heard about the queue and ran away using Cordelia as an excuse.

“I'll have tea prepared. I'll also get them to divide the pie for us.”

“Thank you very much.”

Cordelia spoke and gave the pie to Emina. She was really looking forward to eating it. *I wonder how delicious it is.*

“Cordelia-sama, could you please listen to something else while we wait for the pie to be ready?”

“What's wrong?”

“The main reason why I came to see you today was because of the pie, but there's something else. To tell you the truth, I've been entrusted with a letter from father addressed to Cordelia-sama.”

“Zeke-sama wrote a letter to me? What is it about?”

“Even I don't know what he wrote in the letter..... I don't mind. You're free to read the letter now as well, if you would like.”

“Then, I'll do that.”

Cordelia cut the seal and took out the letter that was inside of the envelope. There were two sheets of paper inside, but everything was basically written on one page. The letter, which began with greetings, was filled with strongly written letters.

She followed those letters with her eyes and then stopped breathing.

『The merchants who bought wheat from Caina village before seem to be connected to a Dark Guild. The merchants themselves are disposable pieces to the Dark Guild, so we don't have any information, but you probably don't have to worry about the village. I have dispatched some soldiers there just in case. At the moment, it is still unclear whether they would retaliate because the village has stopped selling them wheat. It's also highly probable that they won't do anything to the village. They want money, so they probably won't chop down the money tree themselves.

However, they do have the tendency to eliminate those who they view as a threat. I have received a report stating that one of their comrades was trying to gather information about you in Ertiga. This information was only conveyed to a select number of people as not to rouse concern. But Elvis-sama

has given me permission to inform you of this, Cordelia-sama. There is no real threat here at the moment, but please be careful.】

“..... Cordelia-sama? Did my father write something rude?”

“No, he didn’t. It was just that I wanted to visit again since I haven’t been there in a while.”

Aisha seemed worried, so Cordelia smiled to trick her.

(Dark Guild.....)

She had heard about the existence of Dark Guilds before then.

They were places where people, who threw away their morals so that they could live according to their desires, gathered. She had heard about it being like that from her older brother, Isma. It was the general term for them, since there were many different groups. Fortunately, she had never met them before.

(I’ve also heard that they raised a revolution under the pretence of a coup in the past..... What is a revolution when they use illegal funds and trick people?)

However, Cordelia didn’t have much time to think right then.

That was because the extremely delicious looking pie and tea were brought back into the room.

“Wow! Look, Cordelia-sama. I can see fruits where it’s been cut. It looks delicious.”

“Then, let’s eat, Onee-sama.”

“Yes. Let’s eat a lot!”

Cordelia spoke with Aisha about trifling things as they ate the pie.

However, the contents of the letter were stuck in her head and she couldn’t enjoy the conversation.

Then, time passed and it was time for Aisha to go home, so Cordelia saw her to the entrance.

(People who do unpleasant things appear everywhere.)

She hadn’t done anything wrong and the only thing she could do was to accept their challenge.

(Otou-sama must have wanted me to think of a way to handle this if he was willing to let me know about it.)

What should I do and who should I ask help from? She had to think more about it when she got more reliable information.

Cordelia gave a long sigh at the possibility of trouble after her encounter with the prince and returned to the parlour. Then, she noticed that an earring that must have belonged to Aisha was on the sofa.

I might still be able to catch up to her, Cordelia thought as she quickly headed for the gate. *I'll ask someone to deliver it if I missed her.....* She thought and continued, but then she heard a child's scream.

Currently, there was only one child in the Pameradia House and there was no way she would hear that child scream, but she had certainly heard one scream near the gate.

What is it? She thought that, and Aisha was no longer there when she arrived at the gate.

But instead, there was a girl who looked to be the same age as Cordelia there. She had dark brown hair and a bobbed haircut.

(That's a rare hairstyle.)

Girls in this kingdom generally had long hair and noble girls had longer hair than commoner girls. However, even for commoners, it was strange to have hair that almost reached the shoulders but didn't. Even children had hair long enough to tie.

However, other than thinking it was 『strange』, she also thought that it was 『nostalgic』. And what was important right then was not the girl's hairstyle. She realised that the commotion was caused by this girl when she approached them.

The girl was snapping at the Parmeradia House's gatekeeper.

“Like I said! This is such a big house! So there should be something I could do, right!?”

“I said there isn't. If there was, then Master-sama would order us to make the arrangements.”

“Are you saying you're stumped over how many people you have working here?”



It looked like the girl wanted to work at the Pameradia House.

However, Cordelia honestly thought that it was natural for the gatekeeper to take her lightly. Little girls were too young to be hired as servants. Besides, she was screaming in a place where nobles lived. Servants would not be accepted if they didn't have an introduction letter, or at least some etiquette.

She seemed like a very stubborn girl, but she really had no choice but to give up. She would trouble others if she made a fuss for too long, so Cordelia approached them to help the gatekeeper. Then, she noticed something.

(..... What a strange girl.)

She knew this from her hairstyle and attitude, but the strong magic surrounding her could only be said as rare. Her magic looked as if it hadn't settled in her body yet and was flowing out from within.

(It's extremely rare for someone to have that much magic power even though they aren't a noble..... Ronnie also falls into that category.)

However, there was a catch. The magic was swirling around the girl. She probably wouldn't display her magic like that if it was just high. It looked to Cordelia as if she couldn't control her magic.

"Can I take a bit of your time?"

"I'm busy right now..... Cordelia-sama!"

"Thank you for your hard work. It looks like a rare guest has come, doesn't it?"

"I..... I am very sorry."

In contrast to the gatekeeper who was acting a little uncomfortable, the girl was talking cheerfully.

"You're this mansion's Ojou-sama!"

Cordelia, who was getting pointed at vigorously, smiled.

"It's nice to meet you, Ojou-san. Do you want to work at my house?"

"Yes, that's right! I'm poor so I left the countryside..... This is such a big mansion, you know. There should be work for me here, right?"

Cordelia met the girl's gaze and stared at her. The girl waited motionlessly for Cordelia's reply.

"Okay. I'll accept you on a trial period for a while. However, you have to be accepted by my father."

"Yay!"

"Huh, Cordelia-sama?"

"However....."

"Then, can you get this Ojou-san to leave quietly?"

"....."

The gatekeeper looked stumped and serious at Cordelia's joke. It probably didn't occur to him at all.

“It’s fine. There’s someone who would look after her, isn’t there?”

The gatekeeper frowned and then finally said, “Aah.”

“First, come here for a second, Ojou-san. Can I ask for your name?”

“It’s Carla. Nice to meet you, Ojou-sama.”

“..... Then, I’ll walk Ojou-sama to that place.” [1]

So, Cordelia walked through the familiar path with the gatekeeper and Carla. Then, she glanced at the familiar greenhouses while opening the door to the laboratory and magnificently declared.

“Ronnie, I’ve brought you an assistant.”

“Excuse me?”

Then, she surprised Ronnie who was trying to make a cup of tea for himself. Although the tea miraculously didn’t spill, the gatekeeper, who saw that, put a hand to his forehead in amazement.

◆◆◆◆◆

That night, Cordelia tried to tell Elvis what had happened, like she told the gatekeeper she would.

When she asked the butler Hans when Elvis would be free, she was guided to the study straight away. Elvis had already heard about what had happened.

Elvis began talking as soon as she entered the room.

“I heard that you hired a servant.”

“I did. She was causing a racket at the gate. However, I did put in the conditions that it was a trial period and she would need father’s approval to work here. I’m thinking of leaving her to Ronnie.”

Elvis finally turned to face Cordelia after she spoke, and she became nervous under his gaze.

“I heard that Aisha came today, but was that wrong?”

“..... I did receive a letter from Zeke-sama.”

She knew what he wanted to say. Even if they were in peaceful times, it wasn’t a wise choice to let someone of unclear origins into the mansion. He thought that she had made a foolish choice if she understood all this and still invited Carla in anyways. For argument’s sake, she thought it couldn’t be helped even if Elvis had said, “Is your head just for show?”

However, she also knew that he wasn’t rejecting this idea just because he was asking about it. She couldn’t get swallowed up by the mood.

“That child..... Her name is Carla, and she hides an extremely strong magic, but she can’t control it. I wanted to watch over her a little, because if her magic were to run wild, then it would affect those around her.”

“..... I also saw her magic, but her magic probably won’t affect other people even if it were to go wild. There’s no point in accepting someone who could become your enemy.”

Elvis had already seen Carla.

“Does the person herself have any influence?”

“.....”

Elvis didn't answer. No, Cordelia wasn't sure if he didn't answer, or if he couldn't answer because he was unsure. But either way, Elvis' decision would probably not change. Therefore, this didn't change the fact that she wanted him to approve of Carla.

“I won't be surprised if she is connected with a Dark Guild. But, I think if that was true, then she would have had a better way to infiltrate our mansion.”

“And?”

“I was informed that Zeke-sama hasn't caught their tail yet. Therefore, if she is someone from a Dark Guild then wouldn't this be a kind of chance? This is the Pameradia House; we have the advantage. But, I would be very glad if she has nothing to do with a Dark Guild.”

Of course, the people working at the Pameradia House would probably be troubled from her inviting Carla to work there. They would need to keep a watchful eye on her. Other than Ronnie, she needed to get the other magicians to watch out for Carla as well.

(.... The most important reason was that I was worried about her, even if I say such things based on her outward appearance.)

She didn't think he would approve if she said it was because of her intuition. Therefore, she had prepared some reasons to back it up. They both stared at each other in silence for a while.

“..... I'll let her work here on trial. However, reports on her would not only be given by you, but from others as well.”

“Thank you very much.”

Cordelia's thoughts were probably conveyed to Elvis.

An answer was given to her after a long interval and Cordelia bowed deeply.

◆◆◆◆◆

The next day, Cordelia went to her laboratory after she finished breakfast.

First, she stood in front of the door and listened carefully to what was happening inside. The two inside were quarrelling over something..... Or rather, it sounded as if Carla was mad at Ronnie over something. Cordelia opened the door without knocking while thinking that it was extremely noisy inside.

“What are you quarrelling about first thing in the morning? Your voices could be heard from outside, you know.”

“Oh, Ojou-sama. Good morning. Please listen! This pipsqueak told me to work so early in the morning! It's still so early in the morning! You know!!”

“Ojou-sama, listen to me! I never heard about Ronnie not working if he doesn’t drink his tea!”

“Excuse me?”

Cordelia tilted her head in confusion because she couldn’t predict that they would say those things. Then, she looked at the clock. It wasn’t as early as Ronnie was saying it was, but it wasn’t late enough for someone to be angry at him.

“..... It’s good that you’re enthusiastic, but I don’t mind if you relax a little more, Carla. It’s not time for Ronnie to start work yet; this is normal.”

“But.....”

“Ronnie, could you make a cup of tea for Carla as well? And could I also have one also?”

“Understood. Please wait a moment.”

Ronnie put his cup of tea down and stood up. Then, he carefully took some cups out of the cupboard. Carla looked really uncomfortable while watching Ronnie.

“..... Hey, am I really going to drink tea as well?”

“Oh my, do you hate tea?”

“I don’t.....”

Cordelia smiled at Carla who was mumbling. “Then, that’s good,” she said.

Ronnie, who heard their exchange, shrugged his shoulders and laughed while getting the tea leaves.

“Pipsqueak, it’s not like you wanted to work from early in the morning, you just wanted to meet Ojou-sama as soon as possible right? You can relax now that she’s here.”

“Wh..... That’s not true!”

Carla denied it in a loud voice. It was so loud that Cordelia wanted to tease her, “Oh my, that’s too bad. You didn’t want to see me?”

“Hey, what kind of jobs can you do Carla?”

“..... I can clean. I’ve never done laundry before, but I think I can do it if I’m taught how to.”

“Cleaning and laundry, is it? But unfortunately, Ronnie doesn’t do any cleaning or laundry. You’ll be his assistant so..... Ronnie, is there anything you could ask her to do?”

Cordelia asked Ronnie as he was pouring water into the pot.

“..... Something like recording personal research results?”

She noticed why he had paused for so long.

The truth was there was nothing for Carla to do.

She had ordered Carla to be Ronnie’s assistant, but Ronnie’s tasks weren’t easy enough for an amateur to do. In the first place, she couldn’t let Carla know what she had asked Ronnie to do. His normal

duties were confidential and included defence of the mansion and various magical research; so they couldn't let Carla see those so easily. Cordelia asked Ronnie because he knew that and she was a little surprised that he had proposed something.

However, Carla frowned at Ronnie's answer.

"I can read but I can't write. Can't you get me to do something else?"

"..... Then, oh right. How about letting her be in charge of regulating magic tools? If it's a water heater then she could use it for laundry or cleaning. My reputation would also go up."

Cordelia was interested in Ronnie's second proposal. However, Carla looked unhappy.

"I've never used something like magic before. So I can't use it..... What? What's with your face?"

"Nope, I was just thinking you're making such an amazing face."

"Honestly, what is it?"

"My bad, my bad," Ronnie waved his hands lightly, but he didn't look like he felt sorry at all. Of course, it wasn't like Ronnie was playing around..... Or so Cordelia thought but, *what the heck are you playing at?* Cordelia certainly thought that Carla had a great expression on her face, but they weren't getting anywhere like this.

Cordelia went between the two and said, "Calm down."

"Ronnie, this is my proposal. Won't you teach this child magic and how to write? Like you can see, she has plenty of magic, doesn't she?"

"Ojou-sama, I've come here to work. What would it do for me to learn something like magic?"

Carla, who immediately took a posture that said she refused, protested to Cordelia in an unhappy voice. But Ronnie patted her head.

"Pipsqueak, this is also work. This is work to remember your work."

"Pipsqueak, pipsqueak, stop calling me that! In the first place, I don't need magic to take care of Ojou-sama, now do I?! So I don't have to do something like....."

"She has maids to take care of her every day needs, so she doesn't need you to do that. And, if you speak like that then you don't know about Ojou-sama's life at all. Either way, you can't work if you don't study, so you might as well learn magic as well."

Carla hung her head down in shame. She couldn't argue if she didn't understand the situation. For the time being, Cordelia was relieved that they'd decided on a job for her to do.

"Then, it's decided. Ronnie, starting from today, you'll be Carla's teacher for a while. You will use half the day for magic and the rest for writing practice."

"If that is what you wish Ojou-sama, then I'll do what I can."

Ronnie words had the hidden message of, "This is troublesome," like usual, but he was also peeping at Cordelia. *What are you thinking*, that was probably what he was thinking.

That was what Cordelia felt anyway, so she smiled wryly. *Just watch her for a while*, she seemed to say.

↑ **1** The guard



Ten days had passed since then.

Ronnie was teaching Carla magic and writing on the second floor of the laboratory. At first, Cordelia thought that she wouldn't mind it if they conducted their lessons on the first floor, but they had been too noisy, so she decided to move them upstairs.

Even so, the second floor was just a single room and it had no doors; the only thing separating it from the first floor were stairs. She was a little worried because Ronnie's and Carla's loud voices could be heard every now and then. She was a little puzzled, so she quietly climbed the stairs and peeked at what they were doing.

Their study corner was a small table set, which had been placed near the window side. Ronnie sat facing Carla.

"Like I said, magic isn't something that you just silently pray for. If you don't follow the magic that flows through your body, then you wouldn't be able to produce magic."

"Magic power flows through the body.....? What are you saying? I have no idea what you're on about!"

"Ah! Look, magic flows through your body like your blood does, right?"

"I don't know what you mean. Yesterday, you said, 『water flowing in the river』. That was easier to understand."

"No, you didn't understand that at all, did you? I wish you could at least use magic tools. You can't even use them at all."

"Well, what can I do? I hate magic. Ah, but that doesn't mean I'm going to slack off, you know?"

"I know, you don't have to tell me again."

It seemed like they were in the middle of magic practice.

(Carla still can't use magic tools, can she?)

Cordelia was under the impression that Carla would be able to use magic tools if she'd left her to Ronnie for a few days and was surprised that she still hadn't become able to use them.

This was probably not a lie. Magic tools varied in operation time and range depending on the user's magic power, and people who couldn't even use them for a second were rare. So, there was no need to purposely lie about it.

Cordelia met Ronnie's eyes for a second, smiled and then went back downstairs. She didn't want to disturb them.

Carla wasn't irresponsible. She was completely ignorant in matters relating to magic, but she was able to write after 10 days of studying. Of course, she still made mistakes, but she was able to write simple letters. Cordelia thought that this was great, even if she was able to read in the first place.

(She seemed like she hated learning at first, but she does her work seriously.)

She also seemed like she hated magic, but she wasn't skipping her lessons.

(She's probably a really diligent child.)

She thought that as she listened to the arguments that were going on above her. *I should discuss this with Ronnie soon*, she thought as she rested her chin on her hands.

When Carla finished her lessons, she returned to the servants' rooms like the other servants did. Carla didn't have a room yet, so she stayed in a female magician's room as a freeloader. However, it wasn't like they couldn't prepare a room for her; they hadn't given her a room because she was still under observation. Another reason was that they could support her in anything she needed, since she was probably not used to her new lifestyle. Carla seemed puzzled at first, but 10 days had passed since then, and she seemed to be used to it by now.

Then as Carla walked away from the laboratory, Cordelia called out to Ronnie who was lying on the desk.

"Good work today, Ronnie."

"You don't have to say that to me. Why do I have to take care of a child?"

"Oh my, I'm a child too, you know? You've been with me since I was 8, have you not?"

Cordelia said that as she prepared a lavender and rose tea blend for Ronnie before giving it to him. She also put a small cookie on the saucer for him.

"Ojou-sama, you're not like a child at all, are you? Ah, I'm not saying you're old or anything."

"..... I'll pretend I didn't hear the second half."

"I'm saying you're misunderstanding me..... Well, whatever. But, what do you think Ojou-sama? About Carla that is."

He took the cup in his hand and stared at the swaying liquid while asking Cordelia.

"I heard that Carla is basically like a good girl, even from the ladies in the magician's wing. But, they said she always seem restless, and she seems to be afraid of the dark; that she has a big injury on her left arm."

"Injury on her left arm?"

"Yes."

He looked up at Cordelia who was still standing and put his hand to his chin. *Did he remember something?* She thought and answered.

“Honestly, I think Carla is sort of..... working at the mansion because she has a motive. But she hasn’t done anything since she got here..... If she doesn’t do anything at all, then I think she’s a little too easy going.”

“It’s not because she doesn’t want to, it’s because she can’t. Even I wouldn’t move while security is this tight if I was a spy.”

“Then, it’ll be a different story if she had space to move, right?”

“Yes, that’s right..... Are you saying you want to try it?”

“Because I don’t want to think of Carla as a bad kid. I also want to know the answer. And anyway Ronnie, you don’t want to suspect Carla either, do you?”

“Why.....”

“Oh my. Because you’re making such a nasty face while asking questions. I also don’t want to suspect her, you know?”

Cordelia said that and tilted her head.

Ronnie widened his eyes and blinked many times. Ronnie’s expression broke a little at Cordelia’s unexpected reaction.

“..... Just a little correction. What I hate is not that Ojou-sama is suspicious of her, I hate it more that I have to teach her while I’m suspicious of her.”

“I’m the one taking care of her the most in the mansion after all,” He said, so Cordelia shrugged. *It’s really like Ronnie to answer like that.*

But, Ronnie immediately withdrew his soft look.

“Hey, Ojou-sama. I was reminded of something when I heard about the injury on her left arm.....”

“What is it?”

“It’s possible that Carla, ——.”

Ronnie looked usually stiff before speaking in a low voice. Cordelia was surprised and at the same time she thought, *we can’t take it easy either.* Ronnie continued.

“I’m going to the library. I don’t know if I’ll find any hints though..... Ojou-sama, please return to your room.”

“I’m coming with you.”

“If I take all night then please go to sleep Ojou-sama. Promise me this. I’m afraid of what would happen after.”

Ronnie had a kind of prediction that Cordelia wouldn’t return to her room even if he’d refused. Ronnie stood up with a big sigh and drank his herb tea in one gulp. Then he quickly went to the library. Cordelia also trotted behind him.

They were behaving poorly, but luckily none of the other servants saw them.



Two days after she spent time in the library searching for books with Ronnie.

Cordelia, accompanied by Ronnie and Carla, went to Wiene, a forest near the Royal Capital.

Cordelia was straddling her favourite horse while wearing her riding outfit, that could sometimes be seen in Ertiga. That started when she first started horse-riding; Isma had recommended, “Why don’t you try wearing a commoner’s outfit, since you’re riding a horse anyways?” The commoner’s outfit that was given to her by Isma was carefully embroidered with a geometric pattern and Cordelia liked it a lot. She wore a comfortable high-neck top and jacket, and her bottoms looked like something someone from an equestrian tribe would wear and was a rather short pleated skirt. The clothes made it easier for her to ride the horse.

Cordelia understood that she didn’t have the chance to wear the outfit unless she was riding and immediately reported that she wanted to wear it. It was easier to loosen up when walking through the mountains in that outfit, than in a dress, and it was easy to choose shoes to go with it.

“The weather feels so nice today. The wind is warm too.”

Cordelia said that and Ronnie replied, slightly pale, “..... I hope it’s nice when we return to the mansion as well. I’m worried that the master might make a blizzard or something.”

“What? By chance, did Ojou-sama come to the forest without telling the master?”

Carla, who was riding on Ronnie’s horse, looked at Cordelia and asked that. Cordelia put an index finger to her mouth and replied only with her actions. Carla looked a little shocked.

“Anyway, Carla, Wiene Forest is such a calm place, isn’t it?”

“Yes. It’s a little scary because it’s too calm.”

Carla said that as she stared at the forest, and Cordelia narrowed her eyes.

The Wiene Forest, which was said to be inhabited by a lot of water spirits, had a river running through the middle of it. The water spirits protected those who were resting and were a symbol of healing, and amulet motifs were made in their image at the Royal Capital.

On the other hand, not many people visited this place which was called a holy land. This was because of the monsters. Monsters appeared more in forests where spirits lived compared to other forests. Therefore, it wasn’t possible to travel in there safely, even if you had guards.

Cordelia had been coming in and out of the forest since she was 10. She had encountered monsters many times during her visits, but nothing worrying happened because Ronnie or Isma were always with her. It wasn’t like strong monsters appeared just because more monsters appeared in that forest. Therefore, it was possible for her to practice fighting and Cordelia had succeeded in cultivating her combat abilities against monsters, even if it was just a little. She didn’t have sword skills, nor could she

use magic to annihilate monsters like her brother could, but she'd made great progress in using plant magic to immobilise her opponents. That became her forte.

(..... *Well, I don't plan on being a Battle Maiden.*)

Still, self-defence was important. So, she was really glad to have acquired it.

Incidentally, she had kept going there a secret from Elvis, but she did tell him that she was going out, so he probably thought that she was visiting the forest that she usually went to.

A pleasant wind blew through and Cordelia spoke to Carla while holding down her hair.

"Magic is more abundant in this forest than in the city. So it might be easier for you to find your magic, Carla."

However, Carla didn't reply. Or rather, it seemed that Cordelia's words didn't reach her.

Carla just stared at the water in surprise.

"Is this the first time you've seen a transparent stone?"

"Y-yes. Are they all crystals?"

Carla asked that as she jumped off Ronnie's horse and approached the waterfront. Then, she touched the stones over and over to check it out. Cordelia saw her do that and also got off her horse.

"They're all just stones. The rocks in this forest get more transparent the closer they are to water. It's caused by the magic of this forest. For instance, if you bring a transparent stone to the Royal Capital, then it'll just return to being a mere stone. So this is something you can only see if you come to the forest."

"Is this also magic?"

"Yes. You can't see this scene if you don't have magic."

"..... So magic can be this pretty."

Carla scooped the water with her hands and checked that it was spilling from her fingers.

"I don't have a very good impression of magic."

"Why?"

"Because there are only bad witches in fairy-tales. There are also witches who are patriots, in the stories, but a wicked witch will always appear to oppose them."

Carla spoke and looked sour. Cordelia smiled wryly because she couldn't deny that, but she could question Carla's claim.

"Then, why did you want to work at the Pameradia House where they use magic?"

"..... Because they have money, and I didn't think that I would have to learn magic at all. Ronnie's good at teaching me letters, but he's not a good magic teacher."

Cordelia wondered if it was alright to agree with Carla, since she'd said it with no hesitation. However, she continued to smile wryly; if she said any more than that then the target herself would be troubled.

"Carla, can't you please choose your words carefully and read the mood around you?"

"Why should I? I'm not acting much different from you, Ronnie."

"That's why I'm getting scolded by the onee-sama's in the magician's wing. They said I'm being a bad role model."

Ronnie entered the conversation while pressing the tip of his nose and Carla replied with no mercy. Of course, she had no intentions of copying Ronnie, but her attitude could be mistaken for his. Carla scooped the water again with both hands and threw it into the sky.

"But, I think I understand it a little. Ojou-sama and the people at the House aren't bad magicians at all."

"Did you think that at first?"

"I was suspicious because you'd accepted me so easily..... Rather, I would have preferred it if Ojou-sama was a little more like a bad witch."

"Oh my, why's that?"

"If so, then, well, I thought I was going to be bullied by the witch. I'm learning how to write and perform magic; at this rate I'm just a money thief."

Cordelia laughed quietly at those words. Carla shrugged.

"Dear ladies, are you done with your conversation? We have to fulfil our purpose here."

"Oh, Ronnie. I'm sorry. Carla, look at that."

Cordelia spoke and she pointed at the white flower floating on top of the water. The flower looked transparent because of the light from the sun and the light from the surface of the water. No, a part of the flower was actually as transparent as glass. It was strongly influenced by the magic there, just like the rocks were.

"Ojou-sama, what is that flower called?"

"It's a water lily. It is said that this flower reflects people's innocence. It's also has strong vitality."

"Water lily....."

"The things in this forest are a little different from normal..... It's very beautiful, isn't it?"

Cordelia continued since it seemed like Carla had never seen or heard of it before.

"That flower, you know, changes colour depending on the magic it receives."

Cordelia said that and she lightly flung her magic at the flower. Then, the flower changed to a light pink colour.

"Amazing....."

"Do you also want to try it?"

“But, I don’t know how.”

“Your teacher is here. Ronnie?”

“Yes, okay. Then, should we start our extracurricular class? Well, it’s impossible for Carla to do advanced magic like shooting magic, so let’s start with your hands.”

Ronnie reached out for the water lily that was close to him and reeled it in. Then, he removed the flower at the stem, and gave it to Carla.

“..... Do you somewhat know that it’s being surrounded by a light essence?”

Carla didn’t immediately start shaking her head up and down or to the side at Ronnie’s words. Instead, she seemed to be thinking. She was acting different from before.

“Well, I think it should be fine if you can just change the colour of the edge of the flower today.”

Ronnie proposed something that seemed possible, and his words almost meant that he would be watching over her for a long time.

However, Carla wasn’t able to change the colour of the flowers even though when became noon. Of course, it wasn’t like she hadn’t gained anything from that at all; her senses were gradually becoming sharper.”

“Hey, it’s time for lunch.”

“Hey Ronnie, shut up! I feel like I’m getting something!”

“Eh, again? You also said that before.....”

Carla had been practicing without eating lunch and Ronnie was keeping her company. Cordelia watched them talk while eating a sandwich.

“Can you even do it Ronnie?”

“Hey, are you doubting your teacher? See, look at this water lily.”

“What?! I can’t believe Ronnie can do it.....!”

Carla probably thought of Ronnie as something like a rival rather than a tutor. She glared at Ronnie as if him changing the water lily into a light blue colour had lit her spirit.

Cordelia called out to Carla and Ronnie from the tree shade.

“Carla, it’s good to focus, but you should take a little break. You won’t be able to keep concentrating if you go on like this.”

“Huh? Just a little.....”

“Alright. See, it’s Ojou-sama’s command. Let’s go, Carla.”

Cordelia smiled wryly because they were complete opposites. Ronnie was happy that he could fill his empty stomach and Carla looked as if she was fuming. It was interesting to watch them.

“Hey, Carla. You can feel magic here too. This tree really gives me a lot of magic. Did you know that?”

“.....”

Carla put her hands on the big tree and sat down with her back on it.

“The tree’s warm.”

“It is. You should eat your sandwich quickly while feeling it. Ronnie might eat everything up, you know?”

Carla quickly turned her head towards Ronnie at Cordelia’s words, then she looked at Ronnie and the basket beside her. She grabbed a ham and egg sandwich from the basket.

“Say, why don’t we take a nap after lunch?”

“Excuse me?”

“Sleeping is the best way to get rid of fatigue. I’ll also take a little nap.”

Cordelia rolled on the grass as soon as she said that. It was an audacious move, unbefitting of a lady. Ronnie was surprised by her actions, but she just closed her eyes and quietly felt the magic of the forest. Then, she slowly opened her eyelids again.

“Ronnie, Carla, you both should rest after you finish eating. We have a lot of time before the sun sets.”

“..... Well, I’ll rest after eating three more.”

Ronnie also leaned against the tree, but he had no intentions of lying down. Cordelia stared at him and closed her eyes once again.

The wind felt comfortable and she had finished talking.

That’s why it’s such a waste, she thought and concentrated her magic into her hand that was touching the earth and strongly prayed.

『STRETCH』

At that instance, the plants around her glowed brightly. The grass grew rapidly and grasped the knife on top of Cordelia and captured Carla who was swinging that knife down at her.

Ronnie had a short dagger at Carla’s neck.

“Did you really think I was going to sleep?”

“..... Ack!”

“Monsters appear in this forest, you know? I won’t do something as careless as sleeping here.”

Cordelia spoke briefly and slowly moved her body.

“You..... Are you really trying to kill me?”

“!!”

Cordelia wasn’t surprised. She had predicted that this would happen, but she didn’t want it to happen.

“So, you’re in a Dark Guild, after all. I wonder if you’re one of the people who took wheat from Caina Village.”

“That’s right. When did you notice?”

“I didn’t trust you from the beginning. Your usual footsteps are too quiet, and the way you move is too light. You’re probably not doing it on purpose, but when you’re relaxed, you don’t make any sounds at all when you move. Were you sent to me because they thought a child would be best?”

“.....”

“But, I think you honestly didn’t want to do this.”

“..... Why do you think so?”

“You wavered for a long time when you were on top of me. But I wondered if you weren’t not able to do it because of your arm?”

Cordelia said, before grabbing Carla’s left arm. Carla showed that she hated it, but she couldn’t move at all because her body had been seized by the plant.

“Ronnie, what do you think?”

“..... It’s certainly a strong curse. It would normally be hard for her to train her magic with this, but it would also be hard for her to remain conscious.”

“.....”

Carla didn’t answer; she just chewed her lips as if she was vexed. Then, Ronnie muttered while staring at Carla’s arm.

“..... I wonder if we can dispel it.”

Carla’s arm shook at Ronnie’s words.

“What are you saying, Ronnie? It’s not, ‘I wonder if we can’; we will, right? It was your idea to come here so we could.”

“Well, yes. I didn’t think it would be fiddled with that much by an unskilful magician, so it’s amazing that she could sustain her health. I don’t know what would happen if I add an unexpected amount of power into this.....”

“We’re doing it, aren’t we?”

“Well, yes but.....”

It wasn’t like the curse couldn’t be dispelled.

Ronnie looked for the kind of curse that had been cast on Carla in the library and investigated if it could be dispelled. Ronnie knew how much power he had as a magician and concluded that he would be able to dispel the curse..... Or at least, according to the books.

He looked at Carla straight in the face.

“I can’t say that the success rate is 100%, but if you don’t want to, then I won’t dispel it.”

“..... How sure are you?”

Carla quietly asked in return without breaking eye contact with Ronnie. But, he broke the mood as if he was catching them off guard.

“Mhm..... I can’t think of a situation where I would fail, but the percentage is..... well.....”

“Hey, you’re staking my life on this aren’t you?! What’s with that timid tone!”

“No, well..... So, what will you do? I’ll do my best, but I’ll leave the decision to you.”

“Try it. I don’t know what will happen to me if I don’t return with Ojou-sama’s head anyways.”

Cordelia and Ronnie looked at each other and nodded.

Cordelia scooped out some water with the grass still entwined around Carla. She walked back slowly without spilling the water and put it on Carla’s left arm.

“I wonder if this will help a little.”

“Thank you very much, Ojou-sama. Then, I’ll start.”

He spoke as he gripped Carla’s arm. Then, he took a deep breath and rapidly released his magic. It was as if the wind was dancing, but nothing really moved.

Ronnie was clenching his teeth and Carla seemed puzzled as she stared at her arm.

Cordelia watched them from nearby and then she plucked a herb that was growing there.

“..... This sage has plenty of magic.”

Another name for sage was 『Relief Herb』. It had a very strong antioxidant effect. Therefore, in her previous life, it was said that 『People don’t die in a house that has sage』. And, it was also appropriate to call the sage of this world ‘relief’ because it was covered in a pure and powerful magic.

“Ojou-sama, seems like this would be helpful.”

“Yes. The sage here is really a lot better than what we have at the mansion.”

Cordelia returned to where Ronnie and Carla were, and rubbed the sage on Carla’s arm. And, she also concentrated her magic power on it. Her magic was most appropriate for amplifying the power of plants.

“Ah, ah. I really can’t fail, now can I? If I fail, then Ojou-sama and I would be caught up in Carla’s curse.”

“Ronnie, stop your pointless chatter and finish this quickly. Do it before our magic is exhausted.”

Ronnie wasn’t mucking around, he was concentrating very hard. The reason why his voice was shaking was not because he was scared, but because he wanted to avoid getting caught up in the curse.

“Argh!” said Carla, painfully for a second. Then, she quickly bit down and swallowed her words.

Sweat was running down Ronnie's forehead as he traced the magic formula with his fingers. He was probably making progress in dispelling the formula. They were both breathing heavily. Then, Cordelia's breathing also quickened, and her fingertips started aching.

I can't think of unnecessary things, she thought as a bad image began to surface in her mind. The 『Cordelia』 in the game had died because her magic had run wild, and the reason for that was a curse.

(No, don't think about it.)

Cordelia ordered herself.

She could die like 『Cordelia』 if this failed.

I can't get caught up in the curse.

And I definitely can't get swallowed up by Carla's curse.

The next moment, Carla's scream sounded throughout the whole area and at the same time, the curse disappeared from her left arm.

It felt like a lot of time had passed since they first started dispelling the curse, but not much time had passed at all. Ronnie rolled onto the grass and breathed while moving his shoulders as if he'd been dashing. Cordelia was also doing the same thing. She put her hands onto the ground and breathed heavily.

"It's over, right?"

"It's over..... I'm so tired..... Carla, you're tired too, aren't you?"

"Ye..... Ye-yes....."

Carla was the only one who didn't seem to understand what had happened. Cordelia stood up slowly, walked to the river and took a water lily.

"Carla. You should be able to change the colour of the water lily now."

"O-oujou-sama. Mm....."

"Ah, but the water lily is a bonus. I have something else to give you."

Cordelia said that as she cut off her hair with her own magic. Then, she put her hair and the water lily in Carla's hands.

"Ojou-sama, th-this is....."

"Hey, Carla. There's something called equivalent exchange in this world. That's why I want you to cooperate with me a little as a reward for dispelling your curse. And..... Oh yes, would you tell me your real name in exchange for teaching you how to change the colour of the water lily?"

"..... Ojou-sama. That's not equivalent exchange, it's almost like a vicious contract. Asking her to agree to something after the fact."

Ronnie's shocked tone didn't reach Carla, but he continued to mutter.

“Well, my actual job begins now.”

◆◆◆◆◆

【Carla's P.O.V】

In a mountain pass a little distance away from the Royal Capital.

After midnight, I walked in the dim guild's hideout with Ojou-sama's hair.

The woman who cursed me, —— the witch who employed me was there. The witch had her back turned to the entrance as she leaned on a chair.

I walked to the middle of the room without saying anything and put a bunch of Ojou-sama's hair onto the table in the centre. The magic was lingering in her hair and it was enough for someone who could sense magic to notice it.

“..... It seems like you got the job done. I can feel a rare wave of magic from this hair. It took you such a long time that I thought your emotions finally got in the way.”

The witch spoke, without looking at me. I didn't answer.

“But you have no choice but to be here. Kids are important, you know that? There are places that are easier for kids to go into and I want you to remain a good chess piece for me.”

“.....”

“What? You're not even happy even though I'm complimenting you.”

She laughed heartily and finally turned around..... Then, it seemed like she'd noticed that there were two people in hoods behind me. She frowned as she was covered in a murderous aura.

But, I heard an exaggerated sigh coming from behind me towards the witch's attitude.

“I was wondering what kind of idiot would take pleasure in using a kid like this, but..... You're not like I imagined you would be. Moreover, even if our presences have been hidden, you didn't even notice that people had invaded this place. So, am I superior to you?”

The witch raised her eyebrows at those words.

“Carla, I never told you that it was okay to bring people here. Those people, I'll curse them both..... Ack?!”

A dagger was brought to her throat before she could finish talking. The figure that had suddenly jumped at her..... Ronnie's hood had fallen behind him.

“I even crushed two places before I came here as a warm-up, but..... You're really nasty. Well, the damage didn't even show up on your face.”

Ronnie's face, which was no longer covered by the hood, was cooler than I've ever seen it, and his eyes were sharper too.

Then, his superior called out to him, "Look, Ronnie. You're scaring the little Ojou-san." However, his superior was in full battle mode, and he had no intentions of letting the witch escape.

"Please let me off for today, Deputy. I'm angry right now! They used such a young kid like this, and they even turned their malice towards Ojou-sama, and they even harmed the Pameradia House. You can't rationalise with someone like this."

"That's true, but if I let you do what you want, then she'll die."

"..... That's why I'm doing my best not to use my magic. I'm only using martial arts, aren't I? I don't have the confidence to hold back if I use magic."

The witch, who still had the dagger at her throat, clicked her tongue at the exchange that was going on between the two. However, she suddenly looked provocative.

"You can use magic, but you won't? How foolish. You're letting your guard down too much."

"Who's the foolish one? You could barely cast a forbidden curse, and you didn't even notice it when it got dispelled. You're an incompetent fool who can only use curses..... You're exactly like the witches from the fairy-tales."

Ronnie shook his head in disappointment. The witch probably saw this as her chance, because she tried to activate a curse with a wicked smile on her face. But, Ronnie tripped her in the next moment and she stumbled down. Ronnie smoothly executed his next move as she fell.

"Even new magicians know that it's pointless to use magic in close range, you know? You have no talent. Did you think you could cast such a strong curse without a sacrifice?"

Ronnie muttered as he tied the witch's hands with magical chains.

"I'm thankful that your home-base has the least amount of people, but you're bigger idiots than I'd expected. Even though there aren't only good people in the world, this is outrageous."

"..... You've been talking like you've defeated all our hideouts for a while now, you know?"

"We did. Ojou-sama ordered us to. My seniors should be heading to your distant hideout now. Well, it doesn't seem like you have a way to communicate faster than my onee-samas."

"..... Do you think I'd believe something like that? They'll immediately come to save....."

Ronnie laughed scornfully as he looked down at the witch who was still saying such things.

"Who do you think we are? We're the magicians of the Pameradia House you know," He said.

◆◆◆◆◆

At the same time, Cordelia was writing up a report.

“I’ll honestly tell Otou-sama the real information..... I wonder if I should only write 『We destroyed a part of the Dark Guild thanks to a tip from a girl who came asking for help』. My work is done if I just pick at the appropriate places. But, I’ll stay quiet about the fact that I went to Wiene Forest.”

Carla told Cordelia and Ronnie everything she knew when they got back to the mansion. Carla answered the questions one after another when Cordelia showed her a list of the rewards. Of course, she reminded them that she didn’t know everything, but she did have a lot of information from the inside. The witch probably thought that Carla was under her direct control, so she was able to learn a lot of information.

“Let’s send the rewards to Ertiga. They could become funds for the school plans.”

Cordelia wasn’t allowed to enter enemy grounds in the search-and-destroy operation. She had told Ronnie that she wanted to go as well, but Ronnie begged her not to, while looking at her as if the world was ending. He even gave her a reason as an afterthought, “We’re bringing your hair with us, so it would be weird if your magical presence was there as well!” So that was why she was finishing the report properly while they were working.

“Even if they used a banned curse, they weren’t a large-scale Dark Guild. Perhaps it will end..... But, they’ll probably restraint themselves to a certain degree now.”

She didn’t know how much would be conveyed to them if this was done by a child. However, at least it would be good if they realised once again that mercy won’t be shown to them if they lay a hand on the Pameradia House.

Cordelia didn’t know if they were after Elvis, or if they were just looking for information, but she at least knew that the magicians would often drive them away. However, they wouldn’t be restrained too greatly if they were only fighting them off.

“I think it’s quite daring of them if they were aiming for Otou-sama.”

In the first place, if they had some power to begin with, then they should know that it wasn’t profitable to attack the Pameradia House. But considering this attack..... it probably wasn’t a hindrance for them if a section started to hate the Pameradia House. I have to be thankful to the magicians who cleaned all this up in one night.

Cordelia recalled what Ronnie had told her in the laboratory.

『It’s possible that Carla is being employed by a curse.』

He was able to dispel a curse that he’d only seen once, even though it wasn’t made known to the public..... Ronnie really knew no bounds.

“I’m so glad that Ronnie is so excellent.”

Cordelia muttered that, as she put down the pen and looked out the window.

“Carla..... No, I wonder if I should get Lara involved in the improvement of stationary.”

I’ll have Lara make tea tomorrow morning. I’m sure that it won’t turn out well, she thought and couldn’t help but laugh.

Intermission 02: The Pameradia House's Analysis Magician

Six years have already passed since I found employment in the prestigious Earl Pameradia House.

I, Ronnie Eris, was working under Cordelia Ojou-sama.

I couldn't help but think, *why is this happening to me*, when I was ordered to work under Ojou-sama, but now I think I was lucky.

This position wasn't bad. It was rather cosy.

First of all, I could escape from the magician wing, and seclude myself in Ojou-sama's laboratory. I still continued my other jobs, related to the security of the mansion and water inspections, while helping Ojou-sama, so my workload has increased. Unexpected work usually doesn't appear in my lap when I'm with Ojou-sama. For example, the magician Onee-samas saying, "Go buy us the limited cake," or "Line up for the theatre tickets" and so on. Therefore, it's become much easier for me now. I'm very thankful for this.

The Onee-samas in the magician wing are all beautiful, and I think that ordinary men would be extremely excited to work there. Actually, I also saw an illusion at first, as if I was in a play.

Well, I returned back to reality straight away.

Because, you know, they used me as an errand boy straight away, so that was inevitable. Incidentally, there are currently six magicians employed at the Pameradia House; the only other male magician was the deputy head magician, who was in the prime of his life. The rest were the Onee-samas. By the way, Mentor is also included with the Onee-samas.

They seemed extremely disappointed when it was decided that I would be employed here. It seemed that they preferred to have a female junior, and had a tantrum in anger, "We can be affectionate with girls and go to eat cake together!" It was very different before; they would give me enough money for the exact number of Onee-samas and say, "Go buy some cake." Even though it would have been fine to give me a portion of the cake after making me act like the gofer..... Somehow, I couldn't help but think that I wanted to be born as a woman.

Well, they're not bad people, I'm sure. There were rare cases when they told me they would treat me if I changed the way I spoke. However, that's a pretty tough standard for me.

But, that's probably all.

If I had a male junior, then we could probably share the gofer job.

That wasn't the only reason why I was happy to be working under Ojou-sama. The work that Ojou-sama gives me is easy to understand. "Do this," "Do that." There was almost never any 'guessing'. Well, that may be because Ojou-sama is doing experiments that couldn't be guessed. And I think that it's a privilege to be able to drink delicious tea whenever I want.

However, I never imagined eight years ago that I would be working as a helper for Ojou-sama, or working at the Pameradia House in the first place.

I was a magician who graduated from the 『Royal Magic Academy』. I didn't have any fields I was bad in, nor did I have any fields I excelled in, when I was in school, but my major was analysis magic. I was the top student for my field in my final report, and my overall results were third in the academy; I had a good record in school.

My family home is a merchant house based in a port city south of the Royal Capital; and I am the third son. However, it was unfortunate that I didn't have any business sense, even though it was my family's trade. I noticed this when I was around fourteen. My parents and older brothers would persuade me from a young age, "It's fine. You can do something other than business," so they probably saw right through me. Seriously, the eyes of people who run big companies are amazing.

I never wanted to work as a merchant, so I wasn't particularly disappointed. However, the question of what to do next popped up in my mind.

But, I didn't have to worry about it for long. I thought of something when I saw a merchant's wagon, come in from the Royal Capital, at the back of my parent's home.

That's right; let's go to the Royal Capital.

I didn't have a special reason for going. I only vaguely thought, *there might be something interesting in the Royal Capital*. But, I knew that I needed a reason, to convince my parents. If I just told them that I wanted to go to the Royal Capital, then they might hear that as, 'I'm going there to play around.' No, well, it was actually true though.

The outcome of me thinking it over was, to use enrolling in the Magic Academy as a reason.

My parents only have as much MP as an average person, but it seems that I had a mutation, and was born with more MP than the normal person. I was often called when they were moving large magic tools around the shop, but that was it. I've never thought, *I want to become a magician*, or something like that. Well, I didn't have any magicians around me, you know? So I couldn't imagine it.

However, I couldn't come up with any other logical reasons except for that, so I told my parents, "I'll be going there to take the Magic Academy entrance exam."

My parents sent me off with applause. The lunchbox that was given to me on the day I left home was packed with lucky charms and conveyed how much they wanted me to pass. But, having a large amount of charms was indeed a nuisance. Well, it didn't feel unpleasant..... I also felt bad for making them worry so much about me.

The Magic Academy is the national forces' magician training school. The course lasts for two years and the tuition and living costs are basically free. They solidify basic magic within the first six months, and the remaining year and a half was used to make the foundations of the student's chosen field. It is a training facility for the national forces, so other than battle magic practice, we also practiced martial arts. You might be thinking, 'what can be done in two years?' but the course was very intense, and if the student's results didn't meet the mark, then they had to take supplementary lessons at night and early in the mornings; so I think they do master a lot. The instructors are members of the national forces.

And, the students will work in the magician corps for more than 10 years after they graduate. If they work for less than 10 years, then they have to pay for their tuition themselves, unless they were recognised by the war council.

Incidentally, magicians get paid a lot, but the tuition is equivalent to about ten years of their pay. In short, it is extremely expensive. In addition, even if you pay it, you would always be observed unless you were an exception.

It's extremely intense, I thought.

I understand that the national forces would be troubled if that didn't happen. The lectures were free, training was packed together, and if the students say, "yeah bye", after graduation then their magician forces wouldn't increase, and it would be like setting someone with excessive power on the loose. Normally, students understood this before enrolling. Therefore, there weren't any students who said it was intense after they passed their exam, ——— except for me.

Yes, I didn't know any of those things at all, and the first time I learnt of it was close to my graduation. I passed the entrance exam without knowing anything except for why the tuition was free..... I mean, I didn't even intend to take the entrance exam until the day I thought of the idea.

Therefore, I was also extremely surprised when I learnt that most of the students at the academy were nobles. If I thought about it carefully, I would have realised that MP and magic qualities were hereditary, so it was clear that someone having MP equalled nobles; but I hadn't thought of that at all. That was why, I, who was born a commoner, felt out of place straight away. Even though I was born into a wealthy family, nobles have many different traditions from us. So, I soon became famous for being eccentric. Well, I couldn't understand the unspoken rules of nobility, since they weren't in the rules. But, I didn't get bullied, even if I cleared my throat, and the classes themselves were interesting, so I stopped worrying about it early on.

In addition, the thing that I thought was all formal was the restriction on students going out. The Academy was the national forces' training grounds, so I guess it would be obvious that students can't go out; but this was pretty depressing, since I came here to find interesting things in the Royal Capital.

I wanted to graduate quickly and take my time to exploring the Royal Capital.

I panicked, since enlisting in the national forces would crush my dreams.

I couldn't possibly accept that I had to continue with that lifestyle for ten years. No, it wouldn't be odd for there to be stricter rules if I enlisted. That was what happened when I came to the Royal Capital looking for motivation. I was in a grave situation.

I quickly visited my head instructor, and asked him if there were any legal loopholes for this, in a very serious tone. If such a thing existed, then this system wouldn't have worked in the first place, and it was ludicrous to ask, ——— but it existed.

"If you really don't want to serve in the army, then you can choose to serve a noble instead."

The instructor said it without hiding the gaze he used towards troubled students.

This fact was as obvious as 『serving in the national forces for 10 years』 was, to other students; but not to me. Some powerful nobles in this kingdom had the right to hire magicians who had just graduated from the academy. The students who get hired get their tuition paid for by their employer, and, in addition, the employer submitted a written oath to the King pledging that 『I will bear all responsibilities for whatever the magician does』, so they don't get observed. It was originally part of a 『Noble's Education』 …… In other words, it was a remnant of a time when nobles wanted their children to learn magic, but they didn't want them to serve in the military. It was a 『System for big shots, created by big shots』. The Houses which employed newly graduated magicians were all those who had helped a lot in the foundation of the academy, which were about 10 Houses. Well, the nobles now teach their children various things, which includes family secrets, so they didn't need to bother with enrolling their children in the academy.

But those facts and circumstances have nothing to do with me.

I quickly looked at the magician recruiting card. The Houses didn't recruit every year, even though there were 10 Houses which could. So I guessed I could expect the applicants to be quite competitive.

But, I can't lose. The house of a prestigious noble is likely to be formal, but it's much better than the national forces. And I probably wouldn't meet with the nobles often if I do assistant work, so there's nothing to be afraid of. That was what I thought. ——— I dropped my eyes to the list and lost hope.

There were only two names on the recruit list this year.

The first was an Earl named Clydereine.

The main job was to compound medicine, but he seemed to be looking for an all-rounder magician, who could do anything. My major was different, but I did have decent grades in synthesis, and the qualifications to be an all-rounder wasn't too bad. I didn't have a reason to turn this opportunity away.

The other was an Earl named Pameradia.

The job description said analysis. The other things that were written on it were, 『Employment Exam: Interview』, and the time and date of the interview. I don't know if that was easy to understand or confusing, but it wasn't a friendly recruit card in any case.

I was worried. I'd only heard the names of those families.

I felt like one of the names was of someone who had won the horseback riding game at the end of last year, ——— but my god, I don't know which one of them it was. The Pameradia House was having an interview, but having analysis as the job was too vague.

However, there are only two recruitment cards. Should I apply for both of these? I thought as I stared at the card, and then I noticed that the Pameradia House deadline was today.

Huh?! Today?!

Moreover, the interview was in the academy's backyard, and there was only a little time left before it was finished.

I panicked because it was so sudden, but the card didn't explain much and I worried whether or not I should just go for the time being. I haven't prepared anything, but I could probably take the interview if I went.

I won't pass the exam if I don't take it. Even if I fail, I wouldn't be put at a disadvantage or anything.

I made up my mind and quickly headed for the backyard. That's right, if I fail then I'll just be back at the start. And I don't think I can prepare for it with just this much information; even if I do fail, I might find something that could be useful for my exam at the Clydereine House.

I headed there with those feelings, ——— and was left speechless.

When I suddenly appeared at the venue, which was the backyard, I sensed an extreme enthusiasm. I saw a man, with a physique better than a martial artist's, and a graduate student crossing swords.

Eh, a sword? This is the interview scene, isn't it?

I couldn't understand the situation, and couldn't move, and just stood there staring in blank amazement.

The student tried to fight back, but his opponent didn't move a single step. He only swung the sword in his left hand to repel the student's attacks.

"You lack training," The man said.

The student bowed deeply in thanks and left. *That guy, isn't he the top student in the synthesis course? Our majors are different, so I forgot what his name was. But why was he holding a sword?*

The man called out to me while I was thinking.

"Are you also applying for the position?"

"Eh, ah, yes!"

Apparently, he was the interviewer for the Pameradia House. *You have got to be kidding me.*

The man with red eyes was beyond the level of strong. I wondered if this was how it felt to be paralysed to the spot. Anyway, he was really dangerous.

The interviewer glanced at me, then picked up the sword that the student before had dropped, and threw it at me.

Huh?

"This is the interview. Get ready."

"Waah?!"

What is this!? Martial arts?! I, who was surprised, had nothing explained to me, and the man attacked me with his sword.

Why?! He did beat the other student with a sword but..... What does he mean by this is the interview?! Even if this is a practical test, nowhere did it say that I needed sword skills, so I want an explanation!!

I was confused as I barely managed to guard against the old man's attacks; I couldn't even counterattack at all. *Dammit, there's no way I can win. The situation's definitely going to get worse. I have to do something.....* I thought and finally realised.

He was definitely going easy on me.

His presence was amazing and I would most likely be killed if I became careless, but somehow it felt like 'a mentor looking after their discipline'.

That's right, this is an interview. Him giving me leeway to think like this is because he wants me to come up with some kind of answer.

I put all my power into my feet and somehow managed to jump back.

If I think for too long then the old man would see through me and blow my sword out of my hands, and then the trial would be over. He didn't chase after me, but he was standing with an aura that said it would be over if I closed the distance between us. If the Pameradia House wants an analysis magician then, —— I immediately focused my magic to my eyes.

Then, I noticed it. *So it's like that after all.*

This interview was easier than the school's practical exam, huh.

I once again shorten the distance between us. The old man's sword looked extremely fast, but it was still slow enough for me to block it at last minute. *This old man's amazing*, I thought as I concentrated. All I had to do to win was graze the old man with the tip of my sword.

"Uoooahhh!"

I attacked with all my strength..... Which didn't mean I was exaggerating. My sword struck his and he lost his sword. This didn't mean that his sword had been destroyed. The sword in his hand wasn't a sword anymore, but grass.

"Correct."

He wasn't surprised and spoke stoically. I was drained. *I'm glad that was right, but my heart is still thumping in my chest.*

"I can't believe you just knitted ivy with beginner magic and magic power..... This is foul-play! Just how much did you strengthen it with magic? Are you a monster?"

The magic that he cast itself was one that could be removed if another person poured their magic power into it. It was impossible for a normal magician to see through that, in the first place. If this old man hadn't been clad in an intimidating aura, then the student before me and I would have immediately noticed it.

But, I thought, this man wasn't just a warrior, but he also had considerable skill as magician too. The ivy he used was enough to stop the sword; I couldn't image just how strong his enhancement was.

"Today isn't April Fools, so please don't play a prank on me. Even though it's a good year, are you a mischievous kid?"

“I said it was an interview, didn’t I?”

“I didn’t hear that this would be a practical test. And it was super scary.....”

It was only a resemblance, but looking at the old man again, while feeling like I might get the shivers, he really gave off that feeling of 『this guy’s a walking lion dance』 or 『this guy guards the gates of hell』, and other assorted crazy stuff. Whatever I say now probably wouldn’t shake him; rather, it felt like he’d easily turn it against me.

“What’s your speciality?”

“Analysis magic..... Ah, my heart is still racing.”

“..... Your dialect is a little different.”

“Oh, I’m not a noble.”

“I can tell that from looking at you.”

“Eh? You can tell.....? Well, you can’t tell it from the way I talk, right?”

He didn’t seem like someone who would —— look down on commoners or something, just because he was the interviewer for a noble. I felt like he was just staring at me in curiosity.

“You can’t tell who I am?”

“Huh? You’re the interview, aren’t you?”

“..... My name is Elvis Pameradia.”

I felt like I’ve heard that name..... Well, the family name before.

I don’t know who Elvis was, but I have heard of Pameradia.

Huh? Which interview am I at?

I mean..... This person is quite old, isn’t he? Which means..... Huh?

“..... Earl?”

“That’s right.”

“Huh, seriously?!”

I didn’t hear that the interviewer would be the head of the House!!

I cried in surprised and quickly covered my mouth with my hands.

“I, I’m sorry!”

“..... What’s your name?”

“Excuse me for not introducing myself even though you introduced yours..... I’m, no, my name is Ronnie Eris.”

“I’m not going to bite. You don’t have to be that scared.”

My back wouldn't stop sweating at the Earl, who was amazed.

Crap. Where did the me, who thought that this was easier than a practical exam, go? I'm begging you, please come back.

However, I couldn't come back to my senses. *No, yup, I've got no choice. But, I also wanted to put on airs during my interview. Huh? In the first place, the interviewer is the interviewer, it didn't matter if he was the Earl, so it's already too late.....?*

"Are you..... From the south?"

"Huh? Erm..... Yes, but mmm?"

"I was curious since you have strange pronunciations."

"Excuse me.....?"

I was surprised by his sudden questions, well, my pronunciation was definitely rare in the Royal Capital. It wasn't at a level where I used different words, but sometimes my intonations were differently..... Either way, the Earl could differentiate between local accents.

I was impressed by that unusual fact, and the Earl asked me another question.

"If you're appointed to this position, then you might have to go to my fief. Will that be a problem?"

"Not really."

"I see."

The Earl said as he bent his elbow and raised his hand and someone, who looked like a servant, approached us from a nearby place.

"These are the documents."

"What?"

"And also the books."

"Woah, heavy....."

The books that were given to me were like three dictionaries, and they were heavier than I thought they would be. In addition, the letters in the book were already small from the front cover. And the title of two of the books were, 『Dangerous Medicine Manual』 and 『Natural Poison · Synthesis』. They overlapped the other book, so I couldn't see the title, but it was probably something similar to that.

Errm, what is this? Isn't both the books and content too heavy.....?

"Read those before you graduate."

"Read those..... Eh, I passed!"

"..... You don't want the position?"

"Nonono, I'll read it and accept the position!! But, is it alright for me to be like this? I usually act like this though."

It was already too late to ask something like this, and I don't know why I passed. No, I certainly passed the practical test somehow.

"Can you fix the habits you've had for a long time? From what I can see, you speak before you think."

"..... I have no objections."

"At least, I don't care about how the magicians speak. It's fine with me as long as you're good at analysing the presence of assassins and magic power."

"What? Assas.....sins.....?"

I heard a very disturbing word. I felt strangely anxious, *huh? What's going to happen to me?* together with the dangerous titles of the books in my hand.

But, well, I didn't have to worry about serving in the army since I was recruited by the Pameradia House, and I finally threw away the Clydereine recruitment card, which I was going to apply for at the beginning.

I told my family, just before my graduation, that I would be serving an Earl, and not the national forces.

My parents were happier than they were when I got accepted into the academy. I was told to inform them of anything related to business..... But they probably forgot that I had no talent in business, before they even thought about confidentiality. Incidentally, I told them that I had graduated third place in synthesis, but they only replied with, "Hmph." They also gave me the same reaction even though I got first place in my major.

Honestly, my family wasn't interested in anything but money. But they did congratulate me, "I hope you have a bright future." I'm glad that I wasn't worrying my family.

And the assigned books that the Earl gave me didn't end with just three; it increased by 10 times until I graduated. As a result, I still have about forty books in my room. I didn't notice it at first, because I was distracted by the title, but they were all extremely expensive and valuable. He had never said it, but I realised that the Earl had high expectations for me.

And one more thing..... I realised that poisoning someone was actually a thing when I got my job.

"Throwing poison into the mansion, that person is really dangerous, isn't he?"

"Ronnie, it's already fine here, so go call Linda and Amer for me."

"Okaay."

I handed over the man I'd captured at the back of the mansion to Mentor Cecily, and went to call the other Onee-samas. Yes, I was scared of being given those books when I first got my job. I was also suspicious of the Earl, and thought that he was going to poison someone. *I'm sorry, Master.*

My current job was to analyse the things I'm given, to sense the presence of suspicious people and capture them, and to analysis and dismantle dangerous things that have been thrown into the mansion.

“If you fail, you die. Even if you survive, I’ll kill you if another person dies from your mistake,” I was threatened by Mentor on my first day of work, but somehow, I’m still alive today. I can’t say that I’ve remained unscathed, since I’ve had bumps on my head.

Oh, I also tried to learn polite language before graduation, while working at the mansion before..... But, it ended with just me trying. The biggest surprise was that Master said, “Don’t use such disgusting language,” with a frown on his face. However, Mentor still criticised me. Well, Mentor was a very detail-oriented person, after all.

But it’s not like I show up in front of Master or his sons, in the first place, so it’s not a problem..... I thought that and continued with how I spoke, but one day the young lady nominated me as her analysis teacher for some reason.

“It seems that Ojou-sama wants to do some experiments,” they said. And “She said that she wanted the youngest magician,” they said.

I can’t believe I’m babysitting a child, I had thought at first. Even if she says she wants to experiment, Ojou-sama is still only eight. I could only remember playing in empty cargo boxes and getting scolded when I was eight.

However, when I met her, the young lady of the Pameradia House exceeded my expectations and was a level-headed person. First of all, the mountain of books surrounding her was amazing. *What is she going to do by reading a lot of geography books?* They were specialised books that were hard for commoners to obtain, and they weren’t even books that a normal eight year old could read, in the first place. They would probably get bored of reading it and fall asleep.

And the aspiration of the Ojou-sama, who had surprised me from the beginning, was to make balms from flowers. Thus, it was decided that I was going to help her with that.

To be honest, I wasn’t interested in aromas, and I’m still not interested in them, but I am interested in new things, so I thought I got caught up in something interesting. So, I felt bad for thinking I had to babysit her at first.

But then I later thought, *I might not necessarily have been wrong when I thought I had to babysit her.*

For example, Ojou-sama fully enjoyed going incognito when she was eight..... But I had an extremely difficult time afterwards, you know?

“Ronnie, there’s been talk about a child using magic similar to that of the Pameradia House in town, what do you think of this?”

And Master just glared at me like that. Ojou-sama, you don’t know about this, do you? My heart stopped, seriously.

Then, only recently.

“Ronnie. Cordelia invited a suspicious child here, but what were you doing at that time?”

Ojou-sama also doesn’t know that I received a summons like this, does she.....?!

“You should have been by her side at that time. What were you doing?” Under an aura that was stating that, I couldn’t just say, “I was brewing tea, so I wasn’t watching over Ojou-sama.” To begin with, I think Ojou-sama would still invite her in even if I was there, you know! Ojou-sama knows the girl is suspicious..... Or rather, Master, you should have received a report from Ojou-sama!! Well, Master was warning me because he knew this.

But, Ojou-sama. If you’re too reckless, it wouldn’t be enough no matter how many lives I have.

Every day is really fun, but please just let me say one thing. Master, when he is summoning me like this, is a several times scarier than when he was at my interview!!

I’m begging you, please stop being reckless. I don’t mind if you’re a little wilful, but keep it within the 『I’m a little sister who requires a little bit of attention』 category. I’m begging you, please be a good girl, by all means!!

Act 16: Childhood Friend's Request

A few days after the search-and-destroy operation against the Dark Guilds.

“Ta-dah! How is it? Does it suit me?”

Lara's cheerful voice resounded through Cordelia's room in the morning. Lara's outfit was that of a small, small maid, since she was very small herself.

Lara stayed at the Pameradia mansion even after the incident. Her reason was that, “I have no other place to return to.” She had never tried to talk about where she was from, so Cordelia didn't ask. Cordelia thought of making arrangements for her to go home, if she had a place to return to, but if she didn't then it made things easier. If she hired Lara formally, then she could create a place for her to be.

Thus, Cordelia's researchers increased by one. Ronnie's assistant Lara; only worked in the afternoons, right now. Her work was to make writing tools that were easy for children to use.

Lara only worked half the time, so her pay was also only half of the other servants, but her living costs were extremely low, since most of her necessities were provided to her and her salary was for her personal expenses. Lara had said that she didn't need a salary.

What was she doing in the mornings? She learnt manners as a student at Aisha's place.

“Aisha-neesan's classes are really fun. She's teaching me what a lady is.”

“Lara, it's not Aisha-neesan, but Aisha-sensei. It seems like you're having a hard time putting it into practice, even though you're having fun in class.”

It was probably better to leave her to the servants so that they could teach her a 『Servant's Knowledge』, but the servants hadn't hidden their disturbance over how wild she was, —— or rather, it was more correct to say that they were disturbed by how she interfered with their work. Even though she wasn't uncontrollable, it was extremely difficult to teach her work.

Anyhow, Lara had no conventional wisdom of the noble world at all.

At that rate, none of them would gain anything from this. Thus, Cordelia decided to consult with Aisha. “Won't you teach her some manners?” She'd asked.

Aisha liked children, so she gladly accepted. And, she proposed that they wouldn't teach her about what a servant was, but about the mannerisms of a lady. She suggested that if Lara knew what a lady desired, then it would be quicker for her to acquire the mannerisms of a lady..... *Now then, how much would this lively girl settle down?*

“Oh, I'll learn the minimum requirements. I want to be able to escort Ojou-sama. I have to learn the mannerisms if I want to do that, right?”

“Being an escort is a very trustworthy job, after all.”

“But..... I also want to learn martial arts after I've learnt some manners. Won't you tell me where I could learn that? I only know how to assassinate someone!”

Yes, Lara was bouncing around as if she had a tail wagging behind her back, and Cordelia smiled wryly. Then, the laboratory door opened.

“I’m back ~, Ojou-sama. I’ve only received this much distilled water.”

“Ronnie! I can change the colour of the water lily now! You wanna see it, don’t you?”

“Woaah, wai, it’ll drop! Calm down!! And I told you not to go into the forest by yourself, when did you sneak.....”



Ronnie was surprised by Lara, who leaped at him as she informed him of that, and quickly adjusted the items in his hands. Cordelia really saw an illusion of a tail and ears on Lara.

(..... Well, it's fine for her to be a normal maid instead of an escort, but let's not say that now.)

As for Lara, she probably said that since she wanted to get close to Cordelia, who was like her.

But, as she was staring at the two playing around, a gentle knock sounded at the door. Cordelia told Ronnie and Lara to be quiet, for the time being, and asked the person at the door to enter.

“Ojou-sama, you have a guest.”

“Hey, Dilly..... Oh, what? You have a small kid here.”

“Oh my, Vernoux-sama. Hello.”

The person Emina had shown in was Vernoux.

Vernoux stared at Lara. She seemed put off.

“Where’d you pick her up from?”

It seemed more like an innocent question than one of suspicion. His reaction wasn’t strange, as a really young servant was standing before him.

Cordelia answer nonchalantly.

“She’s a promising magician’s egg.”

“Hmmm? Well, that’s fine too.”

“Anyway, what may I do for you today?”

Cordelia asked that as she exchanged looks with Lara and Ronnie. Lara seemed to understand what kind of person Vernoux was, from Cordelia’s exchange. That was the result of her training with Aisha, and she left with Ronnie.

Vernoux stared at the two who were leaving while announcing what he came for.

“I came here to have my usual tea, and to give you a letter from Gille. My mother also wrote you a letter.”

“Ooh, from Sara-sama?”

“Yeah. It’s a letter of thanks, and also contains the invitation for the tea party.”

Vernoux said that as he handed Cordelia two envelopes. She received them while asking Emina to prepare some tea.

The letter was probably about the balm that she’d sent to Sara the other day. If she had included a tea party invitation, then she must have been very happy with it. She felt relieved, but she wouldn’t know how pleased Sara was with the balm until she read the letter. She was tempted to cut open the letter right then, but Vernoux was still there. Cordelia firmly held herself back.

Vernoux sat down in front of such a Cordelia.

“She said she liked the thing you gave her the most, Dilly. She liked the balm, but the aromatic bath was her favourite.”

An aromatic bath was one way to enjoy essential oils, it heated them up and vaporised them to spread the aroma. As a tool to do that, Cordelia gave Sara an incense burner that used a candle. At the time she gave her the tool, she also gave her a new essential oil, made from myrtle; a herb that grew on shrubs. Myrtle helped calm the mind and also filtrated the air. She only had one new essential oil, but she had also suggested different ways that Sara could blend the essential oils she’d received as samples.

“Mother is looking forward to what you give her next.”

“Then, I wonder if you want to take this back with you today?”

“What’s this?”

“Lavender lotion. Shake it well before use, soak it on a cotton and then gently apply it to the skin.”

“Okay. I’ll tell her that.”

The number of herbs that she’d harvested when she was eight had grown considerably with the help of the servants. Currently, there wasn’t enough space to cultivate them in the greenhouse, and some of them were being grown in a cultivated field, that she’d borrowed, at the edge of the Royal Capital.

It was very useful if she thought of it in terms of being able to experiment with whether they could be grown widely, outside of the mountain and greenhouse, but the field being away from the mansion was a tough issue for her. Regrettably, the field also had some difficulties, such as needing to watch it and keep up with the maintenance. But then, she could entrust it to someone, so that she could secure a steady harvest. Even though it wasn’t as bad as roses, she couldn’t possibly cultivate it by herself if she wanted to mass produce lavender, which had a low oil rate, in the future.

(But in that case, it would be good if I can entrust it to someone in the Pameradia fief.)

Cordelia thought such things, but Vernoux didn’t seem interested in cosmetics and asked no further questions.

However, he seemed interested in Lara’s work, which was spread out on the desk.

“What’s that? What are you making now?”

“That’s Lara’s..... The child from before’s research. I entrusted her with the task of making easy to use stationery for children who are starting to learn how to read and write.”

“This research seems much more interesting.”

Vernoux said that as he picked up the thin wooden cylinder. Then he changed the angle of the cylinder and stared at it.

“Is this black coal? No, something different.....? To purposefully fill a piece of wood with something, you’ve come up with a good idea. However, rather than this thing, wouldn’t using ink make it easier to see?”

“Well, this will gradually be done.”

“Then, I’m looking forward to the completion. If this is the little kid’s research, then what are you doing Dilly?”

“I was thinking about a good present for my friends to heal their daily tiredness.”

“Hmmm. So, it’s not like you were doing anything urgent. You can send a message to mother later. I’ll just ask you to write Gille’s letter, so I can take it with me. So please read his letter.”

That was what usually happened, but Vernoux was pushy. However, if she didn’t do as he requested, then he would stay there forever while demanding tea and sweets. That would also be troubling.

Cordelia asked Emina to prepare some stationery for her, when she had finished brewing the tea, and she read Gille’s letter while Emina went to get those things for her.

『Thank you for the other day. Next time, I want to show you around the place that we talked about before, Star Fall Hill. Are there any days when you’re free at night? 』

Gille was probably continuing the conversation they had at the evening party.

Cordelia blinked her eyes several times and smiled wryly.

It was definitely a charming offer, but it was nearly impossible for a young lady to sneak out of the mansion at night. She didn’t know how to sneak out of the Pameradia House, which had a perfect system against intruders.

(Well, I wonder how I should reply.)

Breath, she thought, and after hesitating, wrote a short piece like Gille had.

『If I can sneak out, then any time is fine. The guards at the Pameradia mansion are quite good, so it would be difficult.』

Of course, she was interested in 『Star Falling Hill』, and she was also interested in the white flowers, that Gille had mentioned before. Cordelia did have a flower in mind when she heard that it was a white flower that bloomed beautifully at night. And, if this was the flower that she was thinking of, then she really wanted to bring some stock home with her.

(..... But then, it’s impossible no matter how I think about it. If I talk about the circumstances, then I might be able to go with the condition of having an escort present, but Gille seems to hate being in the public eye.)

So, I guess I’ll just have to give up.

If she had been born a boy, then she would have more ways to sneak out..... For example, using Vernoux as an excuse, but if she did it then it would surely be misunderstood. It would become too complicated. And, she thought that it wouldn’t make her, nor Vernoux, happy.

“What is it? You have a really strange look on your face.”

“No, nothing. Anyway, I think Gille-sama was busier than usual today.”

“Why do you think that?”

“His writing is very rushed and it’s shorter than usual.”

Cordelia covered it up, since she couldn’t talk about the contents of the letter. Then, Vernoux looked as if he remembered something, “Ah.....!”

“Gille’s getting busier too. He has to remember a lot of things.”

“If you put it that way, then you’re always free since you always visit, Vernoux-sama?”

“I’m not free, but it’s fine. Whatever.”

“If you were to ask me if it was fine or not, I could only answer that I wait for a message from you, before you come..... For now, the busy Vernoux-sama should go home as quickly as possible, right?”

Cordelia said that as she gave Vernoux the letter. Vernoux took it and held out his empty plate to Emina.

“I’m busy, but I haven’t finished eating the cake yet.”

“You’ve already eaten it. And two slices at that.”

“Don’t sweat the small stuff. It doesn’t really change much if it’s 2 or 3. If mother prepares some for Dilly, then she should prepare some for me as well.”

“.....”

Cordelia felt extremely shocked at how much of a sweet tooth he was, and put her fork into her own cake. Today’s cake was mille-feuille crepe; it was a thin crepe filled with whipped cream, cream cheese and fruits. It was food of happiness.

(But, 『getting busier』, was it? From what Vernoux-sama said, Gille-sama is from a good house.)

Well of course, I felt that somehow from the fact that he’s been close with Vernoux-sama since they were young. It’s just that I could say that with certainty now. However, I still have no idea which House he’s from. There’s a possibility that he’s related to royalty..... No, I don’t want to believe that.

(Either way, even if I don’t know now, I will find out some time in the future.)

The scope of her actions was still narrow, since she was still a child. If she became an adult, then it shouldn’t be too hard to find it out.

“..... Well, if you say you’re not curious, then you’d be lying.”

“Did you say something?”

“Nope, just talking to myself.”

Cordelia was extremely suspicious about why Gille was hiding things about himself. However, she understood that he wasn’t doing it out of ill will. *I wouldn’t be able to get it out of him if he didn’t want to talk about it. So, there is no need ask.* She thought that as she held the cup of tea to her mouth, but her eyes met with Vernoux’s, who was staring at her.

“By the way Dilly. Actually..... I have a request today too.”

“..... What is it? I only have bad feelings about it if you’re suddenly getting all polite like that.”

It was rare for Vernoux to ask Cordelia for a favour, so she felt uneasy about it. Furthermore, Vernoux turned away from the gaze that had met his, and was silent.

Suspicious. He’s acting too suspicious.

“Would you come with me to the dance party celebration for Earl Hale’s daughter, Hazel?”

Cordelia nearly spat out her tea.

Hazel Hale.

I know that name. Because she had the same name as a character that appeared in the game. However, unlike 『Cordelia』, she wasn’t pushy or malicious. Her most striking characteristic was that she loved to win, and often challenge people to matches. And her mini-games in the game were ridiculously hard and annoying.

Cordelia was already aware of her in this world.

She had met Hazel at the Flantheim House evening party. Hazel talked happily with Vernoux, just like she did in the game. If she had to point out a difference from the game, then it would be that they weren’t as tall, because they were younger than in the game. But, the fact that she wanted to remain by Vernoux’s side hadn’t changed..... Yes, just like in the game, Hazel was the rival for 『Vernoux’s Route』.

But, if that was the case, then Hazel wasn’t damaging to Cordelia’s life. However, only if the world 『normally』 was attached.

“..... Hm, Vernoux-sama. I’m just asking to be sure, but is that party to celebrate Hazel-sama’s birthday?”

“Yes.”

“Why are you inviting me?”

Yes, why do I have to be in a position where I get the attentions of ladies who are crazy about Vernoux-sama? That isn’t good at all. I want to politely refuse any actions that could lead to misunderstandings. This could be the first step to my peace being threatened.

She thought that, but then, on the other hand, it was a request from her friend, so she decided to just listen to what he had to say first. *Yes, only listen.*

Vernoux answered while his eyes shifted around awkwardly.

“..... Because, if I go it’s likely I’ll be stuck with dancing with her. No, I definitely would.”

“You can endure for one, or even two songs, can’t you?”

“If it only ended with that..... But anyway, she’s really intense. Like extremely. But if I take someone with me, then she might calm down a little. Or so I hope anyway.”

Vernoux, who had said that so desperately, must be really bad with Hazel. *I feel like there are no other ladies who could make him this nervous.* She thought that as she looked at Vernoux while putting her chin on top of her hands.

(..... Actually, an invitation to the Hale House's dance party was sent to me as well.)

It was Hazel's birthday party, and they probably took into account that she was still a child, because the time in which it was taking place was the same time tea parties were held.

Cordelia hadn't talked directly with Hazel at the Flantheim mansion. Still, as someone who was also there, she received an invitation which stated, "Let's deepen our friendship"..... Or so she wanted to believe. However, Hazel had probably heard Vernoux call her, "Dilly," so she was probably a little curious about that.

(Hazel-sama's eyes literally look like they were burning up when they looked at me, after all. It seems like it'll be a big hassle if I go with Vernoux-sama to the party.)

She wanted to help her friend out, but she, herself, was cute.

"Why don't you invite another lady?"

Therefore, she made a proposal that could be a price for his request. But, Vernoux laughed scornfully at her idea.

"The other ladies say things like, 『Why don't you come with me, because it's annoying to be with Hazel-sama』?"

"You don't need to tell me something like that."

"And it would cause a big misunderstanding. That's why it has to be Dilly. This won't cause me any difficulties."

"Even if I go with you, there's a chance that the people around you would misunderstand it."

"It'll be fine if I deny it. Hey, I'm the middleman between you and Gille, so you'll do it right?"

Gradually, I feel like Vernoux-sama's words are changing from [request] to [demanding] She thought as she put a hand to her head.

"You're not just being a middleman for me, so why don't you ask Gille-sama? I don't mind doing it directly."

"Then, I'll tell him that you didn't give me his reply."

"You're so vicious."

I wrote it, didn't I? She stared at him. However, he only shook the envelope from hand to hand. *You'll do it right?* Was what his actions were telling her.

Cordelia didn't hide her sigh.

However, depending on how she thought, Vernoux was really pitiful. He was only 12..... No, he'd just turned 13, yet he needed to escape from the ladies.

(..... *It is pitiful.*)

I'm cute, but well, it's not like I don't sympathise with my friend's anguish.

"Fine then."

"I knew I could count on you, Dilly!"

"....."

Vernoux's attitude changed the moment she agreed. His smiling face was somewhat a little hateful. *I should have said no, after all*, she thought, and also smiled, since it wasn't possible to reject him now.

However, he'll probably forgive me if I reduce his sweets next time he visits, in revenge, Cordelia swore in her mind. *I'll never be fooled by his tanuki mode again.*

Act 17: Push Boldly Forward and Mistaking One's Love Rival

Cordelia's appointed day with Vernoux came in the blink of an eye.

It was Hazel's birthday. Cordelia stared at herself in the mirror after she'd finished getting ready.

"I would like to congratulate you on your birthday, Hazel-sama. Nope; that's too heavy."

She should have been happy to receive an invitation from a girl, but she simply couldn't be. *This is my first time going out when I don't feel like it.....* She thought that as she turned her gaze from the mirror.

"Ojou-sama, Vernou-sama is here."

"I'm coming."

Cordelia left her room, prompted by Emina. Vernoux was waiting at the entrance and he smiled widely when he saw Cordelia. *His smile is extremely fake*, she thought and returned it with a fake smile of her own.

"How are you today, Vernoux-sama? I'm a little surprised that you actually came to pick me up."

"It doesn't make sense to go there separately. Don't mind it."

Right, you are. She couldn't say that, but she sighed and made a daring remark. When they'd talked about the Hale mansion, Vernoux thought that she wouldn't have to defend against Hazel's fierce attacks.

"And if you change your mind because we went there separately, then this strategy would be meaningless."

"I won't run away now. But, this is a favour."

"Yeah, I get it. I get it."

He raised his hands in the air in an exaggerated way and shrugged his shoulders, thus Cordelia realised, "I might have accepted something more troublesome than I thought it was." However, she had already accepted his request.

Contrary to his snarky remarks, his gaze was more restless than normal, and he kept glancing around.

(..... Vernoux-sama has things he's not good at either, huh.)

Of course, she didn't think that he didn't have things he wasn't good at, but he was acting differently to his carefree self. It was a very childish reaction. She was taken in by that and softened a little.

"Somehow, I feel like I'm Vernoux-sama's older sister today."

Cordelia spoke and turned toward Vernoux. He smiled brightly, and she felt as if his smile said, "Then, do your best to back me up today."

◆◆◆◆◆

Cordelia arrive at Hale mansion. She came to realise that the casual exchange was based on naivety; she was made to realise that whether she'd liked it or not.

The Hale mansion was full of blooming white flowers and gave off a calm atmosphere..... But the Earl Hale's daughter, Hazel, was the complete opposite of that.

"Hazel-sama. Thank you for inviting me today."

"Cordelia-sama, welcome. I hope you enjoy the party."

Cordelia immediately greeted Hazel with a soft smile when, she saw her, and Hazel replied in the same way; but her eyes weren't smiling. Her eyes looked as if they were wary, because she'd just found her rival.

Cordelia wanted to turn her gaze away, but it might have been too quick for her to do so.

But luckily, the person who turned away first was Hazel. Her gaze moved to Vernoux and her smile quickly changed like a flower in full bloom.

"Vernoux-sama, thank you so much for coming! Say, Vernoux-sama, what do you think of this dress? I did my best to choose it."

"Ah, yeah. Isn't it nice?"

"Oh my, really?! It was worth it to worry for three days and three nights, because you said I suited it."

Cordelia couldn't even retort in her mind, because of how happy Hazel was from the bottom of her heart. *Hazel-sama's more intense than I thought she would be. She has more personality than in the game.* She thought that and couldn't help but sense danger approaching her; she thought about stepping back..... But Vernoux stopped her.



“Dilly, you think so too, don’t you?”

“Huh? Yes, of course.”

Although she had replied straight away, she could see that Vernoux’s words had turned Hazel’s mood sour. Hazel maintained her smile, but her eyes were telling a different story.

That was no surprise. Hazel simply wanted Vernoux to compliment her, but because he asked Cordelia for her opinion, it sounded as if it was the general opinion and not Vernoux’s.

However, her glare didn’t remain for long, since she went to greet another friend, who had just arrived. When Hazel left, Cordelia protested in a small voice to Vernoux.

“It’s fine for you to pretend that you don’t notice that Hazel-sama likes you, but don’t get me involved in this.”

“You understand that it was necessary for my act, don’t you?”

“You already owe me one, if you don’t make it two then it’s not worth it.”

Vernoux evaded her complaint with a dry laugh. She’d thought he seemed like a child when he came to pick her up, but it seemed to be a huge misunderstanding.

(If it’s like this, then Hazel-sama will always see me as a rival in love.....)

Even from a distance, she could feel Hazel’s gaze on her sometimes, even if she didn’t want to.

Don’t mind me, focus your attention on Vernoux-sama.

Cordelia prayed that in her heart, but it didn’t get conveyed to Hazel at all.

(I only promised Vernoux-sama that I would come here with him, but I have no intentions of getting in the way of Hazel-sama’s romance.)

If the person she likes is here then she should appeal more of herself to him, not pick a fight with her rival, Cordelia thought. However, she would be at a loss for an answer if she was asked whether that would work well or not. She had said something incredible, but she hadn’t even had her first love.

(..... Which means, oh my. If so, then I’m more of a child than Hazel-sama?)

No, that’s not true, she wanted to believe.

“Dilly, what’s wrong?”

“No, nothing. Anyway..... Ooh? Hazel-sama is coming back here.”

“Ack.”

Even though he’d said it low enough for the people around them not to hear, she thought it was rude for him to say, “Ack,” while smiling again at Hazel and asking.

“Hazel-sama, is something wrong?”

Hazel, who approached them with a stern look on her face, put a dazzling smile on her face when she saw Cordelia. Hazel’s smile was so beautiful that it made Cordelia want to step backwards.

“This is sudden, but you’re interested in horses, aren’t you Cordelia-sama?”

“..... Horses, is it?”

“There is a horse-riding competition on right now. There are no limits on women participating, but I heard that only a small number of girls join in on the competition; it might just be me. Why don’t you participate with me, if you’re interested? I heard that you ride a beautiful horse. I think that it’s good to improve our skills by competing with people of the same age.”

Cordelia was a little surprised by her remark. She certainly could ride a horse, but she had never said that to Hazel before. The only people who knew about it were her family, the servants, Vernoux and Gille..... Or so she thought as she looked at Vernoux.

He smoothly turned his gaze away from her. *I see, I don’t know how this happened, but Vernoux-sama told her.*

However, even if she had determined that the source of information was Vernoux, the other thing she was surprised at did not fade. That was the fact that Hazel was also interested in horse-riding. Like Hazel said, she was probably the only one who would compete in that competition.

Even so, Cordelia couldn’t remain surprised. She immediately began thinking about how to avoid the competition. She had started horse-riding so that she could go on rides. She had never thought about competing.

(I don’t even know the rules and if I compete, then I have to focus on practicing..... If I do that, then the time I can use for experiments will decrease.)

However, I don’t want to refuse when I can’t even state my reason for doing so. It would seem as if I’m running away. And as a daughter of the Pameradia House, I don’t want others to see me being pressured by Hazel.

She thought that as her mind spun, then she came up with a very nice excuse.

“I often accompany my brother on his rides, so I have never thought about participating in competitions. But if Hazel-sama is competing, then I’ll cheer you on.”

Hazel widened her eyes at Cordelia’s reply. At the same time, her reply caused a stir between the girls, who were listening to the conversation between Hazel and Cordelia.

The girls secretly began talking with their friends and eventually one of them spoke to Cordelia.

“Mm, excuse me, I’m sorry for interrupting your conversation. Cordelia-sama, is the brother you spoke of Cyrus-sama? Or is it Isma-sama.....?”

“It’s Isma-oniisama. Cyrus-oniisama often goes over the documents from the fief on his days off.”

The girls, who heard what Cordelia had said, shrilled. There were even some girls who hadn’t shrilled but instead turned red..... *You guys sure are popular, Onii-samas!*

I didn’t know until now that my eldest brother and older brother are so popular that they would cause girls to get this excited, just from hearing their names. Of course, I’m not surprised that they have fans,

but I didn't think they'd have this many. She thought that as she waited for Hazel's reaction, which was the most important, and Hazel casted her eyes down.

Cordelia panicked a little. *She's probably not pleased that the girls are distracted by my brothers' names, even though she's the main character of the day,* Cordelia thought and planned to throw her a new topic..... But Hazel suddenly lifted her face and she noticed that her eyes were more flared up than before and stopped.

"Then..... I will also learn how to do long rides."

"Excuse me?"

Hazel informed her quietly while trembling. Cordelia could never have guessed that was what she was going to say. Cordelia tilted her head in confusion, and Hazel continued boldly.

"It's very unfortunate that you wouldn't be participating in the competition, Cordelia-sama. But I would like to compete with you."

"Really?"

"Yes. Therefore, I will learn how to do long rides. I don't think my abilities as a rider would be conveyed to you if I don't stand on the same stage as you. I have no experience in long rides, but there's no way I can't do it if you can."

"....."

Did long riding have contests?

Hazel spoke proudly with a momentum that blew away Cordelia's question.

(..... Anyway, I wonder if she's trying to drag me into some kind of competition.)

I want her to stop if possible. It was a contest in which Cordelia had nothing to gain. However, Hazel, whose fire had been lit, could no longer see Cordelia's expression. Then, she approached Cordelia and whispered in her ear.

"So, I'm not going to give Vernoux-sama to you. I'll definitely win against you."

Her voice was like one of a soldier going to war, and crawled across Cordelia's skin; it didn't suit a pretty girl at all. Cordelia froze for a lot of reasons. Apparently, she was completely recognised as a rival in love. She had prepared for that to some degree.

How much easier would it be for me if I said, "You're misunderstanding, Hazel-sama?" But, Hazel had already parted from her and she couldn't secretly give her reply. Of course, her voice would reach Hazel if she talked normally, but Hazel had purposely declared that to Cordelia in that way so that other people wouldn't hear her. In short, Hazel didn't want anyone to hear her, and Cordelia didn't want to take any actions that lacked delicacy, even if she wanted to solve the misunderstanding. However, it seemed like most people had already realised what Hazel had said from her actions.

(..... Having said that, I don't want to throw myself into the vortex.)

For example, if Hazel had been an unpleasant girl, then Cordelia would have an easier time dealing with her.

(She's annoying but she's doesn't have a bad personality.)

Hazel was facing Cordelia head-on, despite seeming two-faced. That was true for the matter of the horse-riding. She had thrown away a favourable stage and announced that she would step into her opponent's stage. She was actually a brave girl. Her gaze was scary, but Cordelia liked her. However, if she hinted that she wanted to back away from it, then it would likely be returned to her double-fold. That, in its own way, was scary.

Cordelia didn't say anything in the end, and Hazel left her again, since she'd been called by her mother. The first dance song was starting. Hazel's dance partner was her brother..... No, someone who looked young enough to be her brother, but was actually her father, Earl Hale.

"..... It's amazing even though you've been singled out."

"You're speaking as if it has nothing to do with you."

Cordelia replied bitterly to Vernoux, who had been watching her from a distance with some boys, who looked like his friends. However, her tone was plain. If they were not in public, then she wouldn't hide her feelings that much, but she couldn't expose such an undignified appearance in front of the surrounding people, nor the boys standing next to Vernoux.

When Cordelia delivered such a curt reply, she also smiled at the two boys standing beside Vernoux.

"It's nice to meet you. My name is Cordelia Enna Pameradia."

The boys on the left and right of Vernoux froze at her greeting.

..... *They froze?*

Cordelia tilted her head curiously. There was no way they hadn't heard her. It wasn't a special greeting. Cordelia, who was a little confused, looked at Vernoux and he sighed.

He's sighing?

Vernoux lightly pushed the boys while she was being doubtful.

"Hey, introduce yourselves."

The boys blinked, as if they were startled by Vernoux's brief statement.

"Sorry about that, I'm Clifton Hack."

"I'm Myles Gunnell."

Earl Hack's fiefdom thrived with their shipbuilding business and Viscount Gunnell's family were originally successful traders. Both were well-known and prosperous.

Indeed, the son of the Flantheim House and his friends are posh, she thought. At the same time, she couldn't help but be interested in the boys, since they knew of a world that she didn't.

"Clifton-sama, have you ever ridden a boat to sea? I've never sailed before."

“Yes, of course. I’m very familiar with the sea. I can tell you about it if you don’t mind?”

“Yes, that would be great!”

“Say, Cordelia-sama! The wood from the Pameradia fief has attracted the attention of people in foreign kingdoms too. Please tell me more about it.”

“Of course. I’m glad that you’re interested in the wood from our fief.”

She relaxed at the sight of the smiles on the serious and shy boys. She forgot all about Hazel’s strong gaze from before when she looked at their faces.

However, Vernoux tapped Cordelia on the shoulder when their conversation was going well.

“..... Vernoux-sama?”

“Dilly, it’s fine for you to talk, but you’ll listen to my request today, won’t you?”

“Huh? Errr.”

“Well. They’re not here..... But there are some guys who aren’t fun to have long conversations with.”

“?”

“Anyway, you can talk with Clifton and Myles again later. Why don’t we dance first?”

Vernoux held his hand out towards Cordelia, after he whispered a remark that sounded as if he was speaking to himself. He was being forceful, even though he had phrased it like a question. Despite feeling confusion about why he’d interrupted her when she was having a fun conversation, Cordelia decided to accept this as, “Well, he always acts like this.”

But, Hazel came back before she could take his hand. Her smile was dazzling. She was probably asking Vernoux for the second dance, but he quickly took Cordelia’s hand before she could and said, “The musician is good. I’m looking forward to the dance,” as he quickly began to walk.

“Vernoux-sama, don’t you think you’re being too blatant?”

“Don’t be silly. She probably won’t give up even with this.”

Cordelia looked at Vernoux, who seemed like he was going to twitch, as she secretly peeked at Hazel. Clifton and Myles were talking to Hazel, who had been left behind, but no matter how you looked at it, they were trying to calm her down. Since their faces were twitching. Cordelia prayed for Vernoux’s friends. At the same time, she was troubled by a glance that was thrown her way.

She couldn’t hear a voice, but she knew Hazel was saying, “I won’t lose.”

(..... I wonder if the heroine was also challenged by her.)

No, the heroine would definitely accept a challenge from her rival. A heroine is someone who earnestly accepted and solve problems even in difficult situations.

But unfortunately, Cordelia wasn’t a heroine. Getting caught up in a fight for Vernoux was just perfect for a heroine.

“I don’t understand.”

“What?”

“It is what it is.”

Cordelia thought about stepping on Vernoux’s foot, because he was playing dumb, but she gave up on the idea because of her pride. She couldn’t stand being thought of as a bad dancer.

However, she was staring to get a headache from the piercing glares.

Act 18: Of Yesterday's Enemies and Whatnot

A few days after the dance party at the Hale mansion.

In the laboratory, Cordelia gave a long sigh at the letter that had arrived that day also.

It had beautiful writing on a pure white envelope. Writing paper watermarked with a family crest was probably inside the envelope.

However, she didn't care about that. If her wish could come true, then she didn't want the envelope to be delivered to her. She had received other tea party invitations as well, but this one wasn't a peaceful invitation.

".....I can't continue with my research, or relax at all, with all of these invitations arriving every day!"

Even if she had said that, it wouldn't do for her to not open it. Cordelia gave up and opened it.

The letter, which was signed by Hazel Hale, was a challenge to a duel..... It was like a written challenge. The contents of the letter were certainly not much different from other tea party invitations. For better or for worse, it was an ordinary invitation. However, every time she went, she was the only guest, and she fell into a troublesome trap of being challenged to various contests by Hazel.

Cordelia knew that, so she wasn't accepting all the invitations from Hazel; but she did accept them at a pace of between three to five days. At any rate, the love-letters from Hazel came every day, and it was impossible to keep refusing the invitations by saying she had things to do.

That didn't mean that she couldn't refuse Hazel's invitation. Although their house rankings were the same, the Pameradia House had a longer history and, in a manner, they had a higher status. Hazel, who sent Cordelia a letter every single day, was not normal, even if their houses had the same rank.

However, she probably wouldn't accept it if Cordelia refused, since she was so passionate.

It would be troublesome if Hazel came up with another plan, if Cordelia had refused outright, and she didn't think it would be good if she clearly stated that Hazel was misunderstanding the relationship between her and Vernoux.

Generally speaking, Cordelia didn't care what Hazel thought of her. But it was terrible for people to mistake the relationship between her and Vernoux just because of Hazel's conduct. She couldn't just ignore it until she solved this misunderstanding somehow.

"Hazel..... She's taken an extreme interest in you, Ojou-sama."

"Yeah."

"Does Ojou-sama finally have a friend of the same age?"

"We would need to have a very difficult conversation in order to reach a friendly relationship."

Ronnie spoke without a care and she evaded, while thinking back on the contests she was challenged to.

The first game was a board game. It was an encampment game and she was used to playing it. She got a complete victory.

The next game was also a board game, but this time it was a game to diminish the player's pieces. Of course, she won. She occasionally played both of those games with Isma, so she had piled up experience with them.

She thought that the third game would also be a board game, but they debated history three times instead. Cordelia thought, *"Isn't today going to be a game too?"* but was forced to realise that it was, when Hazel, who ran out of things to say, said, "I won't lose next time, okay?"

They'd talked a lot and played many games together, but it still couldn't be called a friendly tea party.

"Seriously, I wonder when she'll get tired of this. That Ojou-sama named Hazel has challenged you a lot, hasn't she Ojou-sama? She hasn't learnt anything from this, and she can't even admit that she's lost."

In contrast to Ronnie's warm and fuzzy tone, Lara spoke with resentment, while still working. Cordelia then advised Lara, who had said something in distaste.

"Lara, that's wrong."

『She can't even admit that she'd lost』 That probably wasn't wrong, but 『hasn't learn anything』 was probably the wrong expression to use. That was because Hazel always chose games that wouldn't give Cordelia a disadvantage.

Once, in the past, Cordelia didn't know the rules of a board game that Hazel had suggested. So, she bluntly asked Hazel, "Won't you teach me the rules of this game?" If Hazel wanted to compete with her on the same level, in the first place, then Cordelia didn't intend to ask her to change the game.

But, as soon as she saw that reaction, Hazel said, "I've changed my mind. Let's play another game." However, even Cordelia knew that she wasn't a lady who changed her mind immediately after suggesting something. Her words were a little sharp, but that was the result of her being considerate of Cordelia. But if she considered that, then Cordelia thought that she couldn't see through Hazel's intent at all.

Up until now, Vernoux had never been where they were having their contests. Rather, he would be surprised if she told him that they were having contests.

(In the game, the games that Hazel-sama proposed and competed with the Heroine in were always ones that showed her good side to Vernoux-sama.)

Of course, I don't think it's strange that Hazel's personality is different from the game, but if that was the case, then I don't understand why she keeps challenging me to these games. She's never told me to back away from Vernoux-sama if I lose.

(Why am I involved in this event, even though I'm not the Heroine.....?)

Hazel-sama probably wouldn't listen to me even if I said that Vernoux is just a childhood friend. I'm never alone with Hazel at her mansion. There's always someone watching. Therefore, it's hard to broach the subject of Vernoux. If so, then how do I get her to understand that I'm not her enemy?

It's an outrageous problem, She thought as she opened today's love-letter, and became speechless.

The gist of the letter was that Hazel wanted to visit the Pameradia House. And surprisingly, today was the day that she wanted to visit.

『I feel bad for making you come visit when you seem so busy, Cordelia-sama. Thus, I will be visiting you instead』 her considerate sentences said, and at the same time, they also implied, 『Please don't run away』. Moreover, the time when she said she was coming was drawing closer. If Cordelia had been out, then she might visit another day..... And if she pretended to be out, then the annoying matter would just be extended to another date.

“Ronnie, sorry but can you tell the gatekeeper not to let Vernoux-sama through today, if he shows up? He definitely can't come through.”

“Understood. That boy would probably run straight home if he's told that ‘Hazel-sama is coming’.”

Ronnie said that while looking amused. Then he smiled and left the room. She wanted to question him on why he was looking that pleased, but she didn't have time.

Lara, on the other hand, didn't even try to conceal her expression.

“I will be the waitress to provide back-up for Ojou-sama.”

“..... Thanks, Lara. But it's okay, because I have Emina.”

Of course, she was still uneasy about Lara's manners, but things would get a lot more complicated if the pouty Lara flared up at Hazel. Even if it didn't go that far, Cordelia was uneasy that Lara would glare at Hazel, so she politely declined Lara's offer.

◆◆◆◆◆

After a few minutes, Hazel appeared in a dignified manner, “I quickly came here on the invitation of Cordelia-sama.”

I didn't call you here. She appeared in such a dignified manner, so Cordelia couldn't say something like that at all.

She greeted Hazel in the parlour.

“How do you do, Hazel-sama.”

“How do you do, Cordelia-sama. I'm really happy that you would invite me to your mansion.”

I never invited you here. Cordelia didn't talk back, and responded with a smile.

“I've been thinking about this ever since the evening party at the Marquis House, but you wear an unusual fragrance, don't you Cordelia-sama? And I'm very jealous that you have a lot of flowers in your garden.”

She was a little surprised that Hazel had genuinely complimented her. *She'll probably listen to me now*, Cordelia thought as she told Emina to leave.

This is a great opportunity. It's worth a try; this might be a good chance to clearly tell her about Vernoux-sama. We're alone now, unlike when we are at Hazel-sama's mansion. I feel sorry for Vernoux-sama, but I've already fulfilled my promise. If he wants to reject her love for him, then he should do so himself. Since this is his problem.

Hazel had already begun preparing the game when Cordelia tried to talk. Hazel had put a bunch of cards and some coins on the table.

“..... Are we playing a card game this time?”

“Yes. There are different kinds of games, but do you have experience playing cards?”

“Yes, I have.”

Playing cards was the so-called poker game from her previous life. The cards of this kingdom were coloured and numbered, and they also had designs of occupations on them. Also, the designs were more important than the numbers, so the rules were a little different from normal card games. For example, the person who had two princesses had a better hand than a person who had three knights. Also, unlike other card games, the number beside the picture were not locked onto the picture, for example, if two people had two knights, then they would take the total sum of the numbers to decide who had the better hand. But the general rules were the same as poker.

“Hazel-sama, would you like to eat sweets while playing?”

“That sounds wonderful. But, I want to have them when we have a break.”

“Okay. What about the dealer? Shall I call someone?”

Honestly, she wanted to avoid calling someone else here, since it would be hard to broach the topic with Hazel, but she had no choice but to call someone else if they were to have a fair game. However, she did worry about whether Hazel would trust her if she used someone from the Pameradia House as a dealer..... But Hazel spoke nonchalantly, despite Cordelia's idea.

“I don't mind if you act as dealer, Cordelia-sama.”

“Oh my, really?”

“Yes. I expect that you won't cheat.”

Hazel calmly moved the pack of cards in front of Cordelia. It was new and there were delicate patterns on the backs. The designs were carefully drawn on, and Cordelia felt that this was a considerable expensive item. She wasn't very good at shuffling cards, but this was a game she'd played with her brother, so she had some experience.

Cordelia dealt five cards to herself and Hazel while looking a lot at Hazel.

“The rule is..... Let's see, we each get 10 coins to start off. The minimum bet is two pieces. The first one to lose all their coins loses, is that fine?”

“Yes.”

They both placed two coins onto the middle of the table without touching their cards. Cordelia spoke when all four coins were placed down.

“I have a proposal.”

“What is it?”

“Why don’t we copy adults and make a wager? The loser has to answer a question from the winner. How about it?”

“That sounds interesting.”

She’s in.

Cordelia thought that as she glided her hands to the cards like nothing happened, “Let’s start.”

(I wonder if she’s at the age where she’s overreaching herself.)

Hazel stared at Cordelia a lot, enough to say that she was observing her. Hazel stared at her an awful lot when she was placing the coins down and when her eyes were running across the cards. It was cute how she didn’t meet Cordelia’s eyes to avoid being caught. A childish mind trying to act like an adult..... Yes, she looked like she was trying to use tactics.

(Hazel-sama might think like that, but I’ll use a straightforward attack.)

Cordelia placed two of her cards down and discarded them. Hazel stared at her as she did so.

Cordelia didn’t think that the other person’s expressions were important in this game. She thought that the key to the game was reading the cards in her own hand, and maintaining her rhythm. Would she win or lose? The important thing was the trick[1] of the cards.

“What will you do, Hazel-sama?”

“I’m fine with my hand.”

“Then, I’ll draw.”

Cordelia drew two cards and got a knight and king. *When you need something it really comes to you*, she thought. “Now, let’s reveal our cards,” Hazel said, and she did as she said.

“I have three knights, a king and a queen. This is 『Peace at the Royal Palace』, isn’t it?”

“..... A merchant, a commoner and a minstrel. And then two soldiers. I have a pair..... It’s my lost.”

Cordelia didn’t miss the fact that Hazel had gasped when she casually stated what she had.

Cordelia’s hand was pretty strong, and she was barely able to conceal her surprise. However, she acted as if nothing had happened and took four coins into her hand. *I see, so she was betting on winning with a pair..... Or rather, she might have been trying to see my hand. She was probably observing what kind of combinations I preferred..... Now, what will she do?*

“Won’t you shuffle the next game, Hazel-sama?”

“Huh? Okay.”

Cordelia passed all of the cards to Hazel.

Her first hand was too strong and she didn’t want Hazel to imagine something weird.

Hazel shuffled the cards as if she was used to it. Cordelia stared at her as she did that and asked a question.

“Why did you choose a game based on luck this time?”

“I can’t seem to get luck on my side, so I thought I still have some way to go. And ——— I don’t want to lose to luck.”

Then, Cordelia held out two coins in exchanged for the cards she was dealt. She spread out her cards, cast her eyes down to look at them, and put the cards together again. She confirmed one thing with the previous win.

“I’m staying.”

Hazel’s expression went stiff for a second.

She strongly grasped the cards in her hand. Cordelia got the impression that she was really honest. Hazel probably thought that Cordelia had a strong hand again. It wasn’t surprising if she was under that impression, since Cordelia had shown a strong hand from the start.

Hazel discarded two cards from her hand and drew two. Then she told Cordelia to open.

Hazel had nothing. Cordelia, on the other hand, had one pair, and it was the lowest pair at that; the minstrel.

Cordelia was convinced when Hazel looked as if she’d made a mistake.

(Hazel-sama isn’t very good at cards, and her reactions are those of a beginner. She’s too tense and I guess she has a straightforward personality to begin with.)

It’s enough if I know that.

“Hazel-sama, please distribute the cards next.”

“Okay.”

Hazel nodded at the calm Cordelia, and mixed the cards again. Cordelia watched her silently.

Cordelia preferred to have a safe hand. She didn’t aim to have a strong hand unless something unusual happened. However, she wouldn’t do something as cowardly as keeping a weak hand. She kept her previous hand because she wanted to know Hazel’s personality.

And, she concluded that Hazel was simpler than she’d thought. Of course, it wasn’t impossible to guess that, since Hazel challenged her to contest after contest, but she was convinced after Hazel’s previous action.

(If Hazel-sama simply adjusts herself to the other person, then she’d be easy to provoke.)

If so, then the previous wager was a problem. Cordelia took a deep breath and took the next cards into her hand.

“Say, Hazel-sama. There’s something I would like to ask you.”

“What is it.....? Is what I want to say, but leave that for later.”

“Ooh, why?”

“Because I promised you that the person who wins gets to ask a question, right?”

“..... Then, let’s do this.”

Cordelia held out five coins in front of Hazel, who looked dissatisfied. Although it wasn’t a violation of the rules to put out more than two coins, putting out five coins was the same as declaring victory. Even though Cordelia had nine coins remaining on her side, it might seem like a hasty declaration, since Hazel still had six coins.

“..... You get what would happen if I win this hand, right? The situation would be reversed.”

“Yes. I will have nine coins and Hazel-sama will have eleven.”

Cordelia replied indifferently. Then, Hazel seemed to have thought of something, as she held out five coins from her pile.

“..... Hazel-sama, is it really alright?”

“We can’t take back the coins we’ve already bet. That’s the rule, right?”

Hazel, who had betted five coins, only had one coin left. If she lost the next match, then she wouldn’t be able to make a bet of two, thus leading to her loss.

Cordelia looked at the cards in her hand and then at the pile of cards. Then, she shut her eyes, took a deep breath and took two cards out.

“..... Then I have to up the stage, don’t I?”

Cordelia discarded the two cards in her hand with the design facing up.

The pictures on the cards were a king and queen. Those two cards were pretty strong by themselves. Moreover, the two cards were the same colour and were thus compatible. It wasn’t normal to choose to discard them at the same time. Hazel looked at Cordelia in disbelief.

“Can I draw?”

“Uh, yes.....”

Hazel didn’t hide her stiff tone against Cordelia, who wasn’t shaken. Hazel drew her lips together as she looked at Cordelia’s fingertips. She watched as Cordelia added two new cards to her hand.

“Hazel-sama, are you also done?”

“Yes..... I’m more worried about you. Cordelia-sama, you don’t actually know the rules, do you?”

Hazel spoke as she showed her cards; they were the same as the ones Cordelia had thrown away but in a different colour, and she also had a prince. In addition, she had a magician and knight too. She had splendidly completed the 『Order at the Royal Palace』. Cordelia smiled when she saw this.

“It’s my win, Hazel-sama.”

“What did you say?”

Hazel looked at her dubiously and Cordelia revealed her own cards.

“Four commoners and a clown..... 『Revolution Time』.”

Revolution.

It was a rule that changed the positions of the strong and weak cards. These five cards didn’t have any meaning on their own. However, it became the strongest because it had no meaning on their own. People didn’t usually play this game with two players, so it had a serious impact on the other player when all values were changed.

Of course, Hazel lost her complexion, even though they were playing this game with only the two of them.

“What? How?”

Cordelia felt like she heard those words, even though Hazel hadn’t spoken them.

This is unfortunate, Cordelia let out a small breath.

“To tell you the truth, I knew that I would draw these two cards.”

Then, she tapped and pointed at the two commoner cards she’d drawn.

“Huh?”

“Hazel-sama, you have a peculiar habit when the cards are in your hand. You have drawn the commoner card twice. You always open from the left edge and you hold it as if you’re pressing it into your left hand. And you grip the card strongly, don’t you? The edges are a little bent.”

Cordelia noted as she pointed to the left edge of the commoner’s card. There was a slight bend there.

Hazel’s face went red for a second.

“Yo-you’re so cunning!”

“This is a game where the cunning win. And it was Hazel-sama who piled these two cards together and allowed me to climb to the top.”

“Even so, you’re still cunning!”

“A game is a game. So, here is a question from me, as promised. Why do you always prepare a favourable stage for me?”

“..... What do you mean?”

“A game isn’t interesting unless we’re on even grounds. However, you always chose games that I’m good at. Why is that?”

Cordelia spoke quickly, before Hazel’s anger erupted.

And Hazel looked at Cordelia as if accusing her of saying something stupid.

“That’s because you and I have different tastes.”

“Of course, I can somehow feel that our tastes are different.....”

“I want to compete against you in things you’re good at. I’m aware that Vernoux-sama isn’t interested in me at all. So, I’m not trying to make him notice me. Therefore, I want to learn the skills that the girl he cares about is good at, and become better at them than her. If I do that, then he might become interested in me, right?”

Cordelia was taken aback by how boldly Hazel had declared that. The girl named Hazel was more positive than she’d thought. Vernoux already seemed to be at the stage where he found her hard to deal with, rather than being uninterested in her.

Cordelia couldn’t say that Hazel’s foresight was completely wrong. Vernoux was probably interested in Cordelia, but not in the terms of love, because he kept calling her an 『eccentric person』. Therefore, he really wasn’t interested in her as a love interest.

Cordelia cleared her throat.

“With the way you speak, I think you’re misunderstanding something.”

“Cordelia-sama, I have answered your question, now can I ask one?”

“Yes?”

Hazel changed the subject half-way, as if the conversation was already over, and Cordelia stared at her in surprise. Hazel didn’t look as if she felt bad about it at all.

“The condition was that the winner gets to ask the question, was it not?”

“You don’t mind since you cheated, right Cordelia-sama? You said that I’ve 『misunderstood』, but what relationship do you have with Vernoux-sama? Tell me honestly.”

“I have already mentioned it numerous times..... Vernoux is just a childhood friend.”

“I know that much!”

“..... There aren’t any other words to describe our relationship.”

“But Vernoux-sama often comes to this mansion, doesn’t he!?! I’ve heard the rumours!”

Hazel grasped both her hands and stood up, and Cordelia looked up at her in amazement. This was the first time Cordelia had heard that there was a rumour about Vernoux often visiting the Pameradia mansion. She couldn’t deny that fact, but she finally understood why Hazel wouldn’t believe Cordelia when she said that they were childhood friends.

(The seeds of trouble have been thoroughly sown by Vernoux-sama.)

Having him owe me one isn't worth this, she thought, as she began to ponder. Why does he come to the mansion? More than half of the reasons for why he comes here is because he can't eat sweets at home; but if I say that then I would be adding fuel to the fire. Having said that, it would be too suspicious if I stay quiet. So, I have no choice but to say the other reason.

Cordelia made up her mind.

"I am exchanging letters with Vernoux-sama's friend, and he comes here to deliver the letters on his behalf."

This was something that she didn't want to tell anyone if possible. But, this situation called for it, because she didn't have any other way to convince Hazel.

Hazel raised her eyebrow.

"..... On his behalf? Vernoux-sama, who is from a Marquis House, is delivering a letter on that person's behalf?"

"Yes. I don't know the details."

Hazel looked dubious, so Cordelia was prepared for her to say something like, "How could he make Vernoux-sama do something like that!" *I didn't think about it much, since they are friends, but Gillesama, who used Vernoux-sama, the heir of a Marquis House, as an errand boy, probably had a lot of courage. However, it isn't strange if Vernoux-sama delivered the letters, because he wanted to eat sweets.*

Hazel was at a loss for words before Cordelia thought that, but at the next second her eyes began to sparkle.

...Sparkle?

"Taking his time to deliver a letter..... Oh my..... How kind can Vernoux-sama be!"

"..... I guess so."

"Ooh, Vernoux-sama is really sweet."



If you asked Cordelia, she felt that he was more calculating than kind, but she agreed anyways. Even if he was calculating, he wasn't cold. To begin with, she would definitely not say something like that to Hazel. If she did, then they would get into an unnecessary argument.

Hazel looked very happy with both hands on her red cheeks.

"Vernoux-sama stole my heart when I was five."

"....."

Cordelia nodded along to Hazel's suddenly confession, and she felt like this was going to be a long story.

"I was shy and almost fell, but Vernoux-sama held me up. He was just like a prince from a fairy-tale. Since then, I've always wanted to be reflected in his eyes, and I wanted to talk to him more."

"..... Is that so?"

"I heard that Vernoux-sama always visits you, so I swore that I wouldn't lost to you. But if this is because of his big heart..... Then I'm really embarrassed."

Hazel said that cutely, while her cheeks were flushed; she was in full maiden mode.

However, it's too late for her to be acting like this, since she is the person who keeps on challenging me to games over and over again..... No, I can't think like that. This might finally be my chance. I really want to resolve this misunderstanding now.

"So, what relationship do you have with Vernoux-sama's friend.....? His friend is male, right?"

Cordelia immediately answered, "He is." She didn't know what would happen this time if Hazel thought that Vernoux's friend was female. She had a strong hunch that Hazel would immediately demand to meet that person. *No, she would probably demand it.*

Hazel showed a blatant relieved expression, and Cordelia vaguely felt that she really liked Vernoux. If she wasn't feeling tired, then she would definitely find it charming. Yes, if she wasn't tired. She felt exhausted right now.

In contrast to Cordelia, Hazel seemed relaxed and she questioned Cordelia without giving her a moment to breath.

"Does Cordelia-sama and..... your friend, have the same feelings?"

"*GULP*"

Cordelia stopped herself from spurting and stared at Hazel.

How dreadful. Is this what girls in love talk about.....? She thought. However, contrary to her thoughts, she didn't forget to smile and replied calmly to Hazel.

"Gille-sama is a friend."

"Oh my, so his name is Gille-sama!"

Hazel was gripping both her hands and Cordelia felt like stepping back.

I don't have anything I could talk to Hazel about. The answer that Hazel-sama is anticipating isn't coming. It would be strange for me to talk about the contents of the letters and if I say, "I danced with him at the Marquis' House the other night," then she would go out of control. Definitely. I have to avoid this somehow..... She thought that but Hazel didn't let her off easily.

"We have to do that!"

"Wh-what?"

"I've read about talking all night with a good friend before in a book..... I want to do that. So, Cordelia-sama, please sleep over at my house!"

"..... Excuse me?"

Cordelia froze at the unexpected invitation.

An invitation to a sleepover?

(No, I wonder when we were recognised as friends.....)

At this time, Cordelia didn't think about whether sleepovers existed for female nobles, because if it didn't then Hazel would make it happen. She wouldn't be surprised at whatever Hazel declared..... But she couldn't help but feel perplexed at that recognition.

She didn't intend to refuse. Or rather, she wasn't able to refuse in this situation..... Even so, it was too impulsive.

"We can draw and embroider in the day time. Let's have a lot of fun."

"Drawing and embroidery..... Is it?"

"Yes, of course we'll talk about love as well! We'll also talk about your fragrances!"

The thing that Cordelia thought as she looked at Hazel, who was smiling her best smile, was; *there are a lot of things that she's good at, even if there are somethings that she's bad at.*

Act 19: Exchange Between Ladies

Several days after Cordelia reconciled (?) with Hazel.

It had been a long time since she hadn't received an envelope with the Hale family crest on it, so she went to visit Elvis's study. Elvis wasn't home often on holidays, but he had been home since morning.

He looked uncertain when he saw his daughter. However, the changes in his expression were so subtle that people, who didn't know him well wouldn't notice, however, there was no way Cordelia wouldn't notice. Despite that, they were even, since Cordelia usually pretended to act calm.

(It's a little hard to start the conversation.....)

She wasn't going to talk about anything important, but the mood around them felt like they were going to talk about something serious.

It was hard to start the conversation, but she felt terrible that Elvis had stopped working, even though he was busy. Cordelia gulped a little, looked straight at Elvis, and prepared herself.

"Otou-sama..... Hazel-sama, the daughter of Earl Hale, has invited me to sleepover at her mansion in five days. Do you mind if I accept this invitation?"

Cordelia spoke in a voice that sounded as if she was forcing her feelings back.

Elvis, who saw that, looked as if he was baffled. It might have sounded to him like she didn't want to go, even though she was asking for permission.

Even Cordelia realised that her voice had come out like that. She contemplated that deceiving people was her weak point, and kept in mind that she should improve that in the future. Be that as it may, she had already done it. It was just a request, and she didn't think that it needed to be concealed from her father. *I just have to be honest when asking about something*, she thought as she waited for a reply.

"..... I don't mind."

Elvis replied briefly, after a moment of silence.

"Earl Hale's House doesn't have any special traits, but there's no harm in associating with them."

It was a horrible thing to say, but Elvis was probably honest.

"But the Earl does have a daughter who thinks of weird things."

Elvis didn't say anything after that, so Cordelia bowed and left. Then she secretly began to think when she was out of the room.

(I'm also a lady who does strange things in this society..... Well, of course, Otou-sama acknowledges that.)

I got permission.

She had no choice but to go now that she'd received permission. She should have been happy that she'd received it..... But she felt a little depressed because she'd lost her reason to decline.

(Drawing and embroidery..... I can't practice it to that extent. I'm not good at it, but I'll manage somehow. But.....)

What the heck are we doing with love stories? What should I talk about?

Cordelia didn't understand why Hazel recognised her as a friend, but she was happy about it. However, she had never heard of an event where ladies in society talked all night about love with a friend. Of course, there was a possibility that she was just naïve, and didn't know about it. However, she guessed that it was probably the first time Hazel was hosting a sleepover from the way she talked.

“For now, we'll be staying up all night.”

She did say we would be talking all night, Cordelia nodded. I wonder if it's like the pyjama parties from my previous life..... But of course, I've never experienced those before.

If it was like a pyjama party, then she could probably let Hazel talk until she ran out of things to talk about. But, she wanted to talk all night long with Cordelia..... Which meant that Cordelia would probably have to join in the conversation, and that would be inconvenient.

Since Cordelia had no experience with the word 『love』 in this life or in her previous life.

Of course, she would probably nod if asked whether she wanted to experience a beautiful love. However, she couldn't see a clear vision of what a beautiful love was.

(In the first place, love was something that happened around me, and I would hear about it, or I'd see it in dramas or manga; that and I enjoyed love based games.)

Therefore, it wasn't something she could talk about at present. However, she thought that and retorted, *it's still too early for the current me to give up. I'm still only 12 years old in this life. There are plenty of opportunities for me to experience it.*

“..... At least I can ask her about what books she reads. Then I'll know what kind of sleepover it is, and what I could talk about..... We could have talked about novels instead of love, in the first place.”

She changed her depressed state and hummed.

No plan, no simulation.

That felt like the most challenging problem she had ever faced. And, at the same time, she became embarrassed that she was worried about it alone. Her lips started trembling, and she felt like her face was heating up. She began to think that the contests that Hazel challenged her to were easier than this. She hid her face with her hands.

What should I ask her? What do I have to talk about?

Cordelia felt like she was taking an interview. She was restless. She didn't understand what topics Hazel, who was 12 for the first time, would be happy to talk about, because it was her second time being 12. *What can we talk about?*

Although Cordelia didn't recognise herself as an adult, even though it was her second life, she thought of age as something that added up as you lived. She had been living as 『Cordelia』 for 12 years. Of

course, she was still a child in this world. A suitable environment was needed for mental growth; that included conversations and social situations. Therefore, even though it could be said that she was an adult in her previous life, she was doubtful that she could call herself an adult here, even if she based it on the values of this world.

..... Of course, those were excuses she made to herself, and there was no doubt that she had accumulated more years than Hazel.

“Huh, Ojou-sama?”

“Oh my, Lara. Welcome back.”

Lara, who was wearing clothes for going out, called out from behind her, as she thought in anguish. Lara had probably just returned from Aisha’s place. She looked more graceful than usual. Lara didn’t make many unnecessary movements, because of her upbringing, and she would be viewed as a lady if she remained silent. That was only if she stayed silent.

“What’s wrong? You’re frowning. Are you worried about something?”

“I’m not really worried about anything..... Say, Lara. Do you..... know what love is?”

Cordelia asked Lara as if she was asking something normal. The answer she was expecting was, “I don’t know”. If so, then she thought that she could conclude that Hazel was a ‘precocious girl’.

However, Lara didn’t answer Cordelia. ——— Instead, her face went red, and she flapped her mouth open and close.

..... *Huh?*

“Er, O-Ojou-sama.....?! I don’t really.....!”

“Lara.....?”

“Aaaaaaaaah, I’m late for work!! I’m going to go change!”

And Lara trotted away, disappearing from Cordelia’s view.

Cordelia, who had been left behind, was dumbfounded. Apparently, Lara knew about love..... No, it looked like she knew what it felt like to be in love.

And she felt like she had been incredibly ditched.

I didn’t expect her to act like that. And, and what’s more.....

“I wonder if I should prepare before I go.....”

Cordelia felt like she was in the minority when she saw how Lara acted.

Luckily, she didn’t have anything that she had to finish today. So, she could read a romance story and talk to Hazel about the popular romance stories of this world. She decided that and headed towards the library.

Cordelia immediately started searching for a romance novel when she entered the library..... Then, she noticed a fundamental problem.

“..... My goodness! There’s no way our library would have popular romance novels.”

The library in the Pameradia House consisted of practical books, history books, ancient literature, etc. They didn’t shelve popular romance novels. If her sister hadn’t married, then they would probably have popular romance novels in the library.

In fact, popular romance novels from seven years ago..... In other words, romance novels from before her sister got married, occupied a small corner in the library. Cordelia had also read them many times for enjoyment. But, there were no stories from after her sister got married. If no one was reading it, then no one would buy it. In short, they didn’t increase. The stories her sister read were probably different from those that Hazel read.

Cordelia dropped her shoulders in disappointment. She was already at the library, so she decided to borrow some books that interested her, and looked around. The first thing that caught her eye was a war chronicle, written in the olden days. She remembered Isma had raved about that book before. Therefore, she was interested in it..... But no. It was too old, and she might damage the book if she took it out of the library. *How unfortunate.*

“Argh, I don’t have the time to be doing this!”

She was certain that she would be absorbed in reading if she were to return with something that greatly interested her. Then, she would remain clueless as the date for the sleepover drew closer. That wasn’t good at all. She should probably stop looking for a book to borrow.

However, even if she understood that a lot of things in the library fascinated her.

“Oh.....? Is this a star chart?”

Immediately after giving up on the war chronicles, Cordelia pulled out the star chart, which was stuffed into one of the shelves, while thinking, *what is this doing here?* She hadn’t been that interested in stars before, but that didn’t mean she didn’t have an interest at all. It was made out of stained glass, and was a little heavy, but very beautiful. She decided to take it back to her room with a book after hesitating a bit. The book she had brought back with her was about stars.

She suddenly remembered about Gille’s invitation, at that time.

Sneaking out at night..... It’s impossible after all. If I want to sneak out at night, then I’ll have to sneak out when I’m not staying at home.

“On the other hand, sneaking out of Hazel-sama’s mansion at night..... is impossible after all.”

She had visited Hazel’s mansion several times and observed that the surveillance at the Hale House was sloppy than at the Pameradia House. Of course, they were fortified in the critical sections, but they probably only did just as much as was required. Therefore, she could sneak out from the Hale mansion at night, if she wanted to..... But she would cause trouble for the Hale House if something happened.

Cordelia had already told Gille that it would be difficult for her to sneak out so it wouldn’t become a problem even if she couldn’t go.

“If Gille-sama was a girl then it would.....”

Cordelia stopped forcefully.

If Gille-sama was a girl?

If he was, then I wouldn't have met him at all, right? He went incognito in town with Vernoux-sama because he's a boy. That was how I became friends with him. Also, I could dance with him because he's a boy.....

“..... Le-let's stop. Yeah, let's stop thinking about it.”

There wasn't a need for her to be making excuses for anyone, but she did it anyway. She cleared her throat and stopped thinking.

Then, she opened her bedroom door. *Now that I've thought about it more wasn't my dance situation just like a scene from a romance novel?* She recalled that and became embarrassed. *Gille-sama seems used to it, so does he invite girls to dance often? If so, then wouldn't he be a natural playboy in the future.....? Stop it, if I keep thinking like this, then I don't know what kind of face I can show Gille-sama the next time we meet. He's a small gentleman, it's so rude of me to let my imagination run wild.*

Alright, I'll really change the topic this time. And I'll read this book about stars after I've prepared for the sleepover.

“Now then, what outfits do I need?”

Is it easy to pack my luggage? It might become bulky since I can't just pack one pair of pyjamas. I don't want to pack that much, but I'll have to compromise and increase my clothes to a certain extent.

Cordelia felt a little anxious as she turned towards the chest. She also had a souvenir that she wanted to give Hazel, on top of her own stuff.

It was an aroma candle.

“I don't know if Hazel-sama would like this scent..... But let's give her this one.”

The chest that Cordelia was looking through contained lavender and orange scented candles. Cookies and scones, accompanied with orange tarts and jam, were often served at Hazel's mansion, so she probably liked that fragrance. That was the main reason why Cordelia had chosen it, and the second reason was the effect. That fragrant relieved tension and anxiety. If Hazel could relax with that fragrance, then most of her tension would probably be relieved. Then, they might not have to stay up all night. Cordelia put the candle into a paper box and decorated it with a thin ribbon while having such expectations in mind.

(It's not good to stay up all night, before talking about love, in the first place. It's beauty's enemy.)

So, I want to make her feel sleepy. Yes, so we can quietly finish this sudden event with a good night's sleep.

“—— Somehow, it's like I'm afraid of it.”

It's not like she's going to stab me, so why can't I stay calm? Why am I panicking a little?

Cordelia gently stroked the ribbon on the box and gave a short sigh.



Then, five days later, in the afternoon.

Cordelia got out of the carriage, with her luggage, in front of Earl Hale's mansion. Her luggage hadn't been packed for an 『overnight trip』 like in her previous world, but she did compact it.

In the end, Cordelia couldn't rest at all, because she had been thinking about how she would be staying over here for the next couple days. She didn't understand it well, but she felt an itch somewhere.

However, in contrast to Cordelia's feeling, Hazel greeted her with a big smile.

“Welcome, Cordelia-sama!”

“How do you do, Hazel-sama? I'll be in your care.”

Her smile made one think of flowers in full bloom. Cordelia couldn't help but think, *my impression of her would have changed if she looked like this from the first time I met her.*

Hazel was in an excellent mood and looked as if she was going to hug Cordelia as she took her hand.

“I procured a new embroidery tool for today. Ah, I've also prepared your favourite things in the guest room.”

“I, I see. Thank you very much.”

“You don't have to be that stiff! We're best friends, aren't we?”

Our status has elevated from friends to best friends in the time we haven't met.....!

Cordelia managed to smile somehow, even though she was surprised. She didn't feel bad because Hazel liked her, but she couldn't relax.

Hazel pulled her hand, and they went to the guest room first. Emina had carried her luggage in, and then went home.

Hazel said, “I'll join you in a bit,” and went back to her own room. Cordelia thought that she could finally breathe a little before Hazel came back..... But there was a light knock at the door the moment she thought that.

“Cordelia-sama, it's Hazel.”

“So fast.....”

I really only had a second to relax. Although she thought so, she could have predicted this would happen from how hyper Hazel was acting. “Come in,” she said, and the door was quickly opened.

“I'm back with the embroidery tools.”

In addition to Hazel's personal toolbox, she also had a basket full of different coloured threads and beautiful white handkerchiefs. Those were probably Hazel's favourite items and were several times

more than what Cordelia had. That didn't mean that Cordelia held a small amount of embroidery items, it just meant that Hazel liked to collect them that much.

"Do you like embroidering, Hazel-sama?"

"Yes. Otou-sama always says that men like women who can embroider."

She boasted as she put the tools down onto the table near the window.

"You get along really well with your Otou-sama, don't you?"

"Yes. Because I'm the daughter, he's proud of!"

Hazel put her hand to her chest as she said that, and her eyes looked gentler. *They're really close.* Cordelia felt a little closer to her. *We might be surprisingly similar in some respects.* She thought and felt a little bit of her tension fade.

At the same time, she was a little envious of Hazel.

Her father was proud to have her as a daughter.

Cordelia still didn't have the confidence to make that claim. Or rather, she couldn't image Elvis going around bragging about his daughter, and she was doubtful about whether he had someone to boast to.

(No, I'm satisfied with the fact that Otou-sama acknowledges what I do, even if he doesn't brag to other people about it.)

Hazel continued talking, without worrying about how Cordelia was feeling.

"Otou-sama told me that he decided to marry Okaa-sama after she gave him a handkerchief. She had embroidered a bluebird, which carries good luck, onto it. It's so dreamy."

"Your Okaa-sama is also good at embroidering, isn't she?"

"Yes. Okaa-sama's embroiders give off a gentle feeling."

Hazel said that while mesmerised. "My future darling is....." she said, as she stared off into the distance. "Kyaaa," she shrieked happily.

"Then, will you be embroidering a bluebird?"

"Yes. I've been practising every day so I can give my future darling my best work. I'll keep on practising!"

"That's lovely..... Now then, what motif should I use?"

The lucky bluebird is charming, but the motif that Hazel had couldn't be imitated easily. So, what should I choose? She had embroidered flowers before, at home, but that was only given to her because her tutor thought she liked flowers. She hadn't picked it by herself.

(I do like flowers, but that doesn't mean I want to embroider them.)

This was the first time she was choosing the design on her own, so she didn't know what to choose. On top of that, Hazel had an assortment of coloured threads which made choosing even harder.

Hazel touched her cheeks and proposed, “Then how about a lion?”

“A lion, you say?”

“There’s a sample here, and lions are considered holy beasts for knights. I’m sure your Otou-sama and Onii-samas would be happy.”

Cordelia could certainly understand that.

But, a lion.

She felt it was a bit more difficult..... But, she couldn’t escape from the bright aura that Hazel was giving off, that said 『Here’s a good idea! 』

“Lions are also said to be guardian deities. I’ll do my best.”

“What colour are you going to make it? A golden lion, or a silver lion..... No, a black lion is wonderful.”

“Well..... I don’t know, how about this red or light pink.....”

“No, gold is nice after all! A glistening golden lion..... How lovely!”

“..... Yes, then, can I borrow the gold?”

Hazel was off in her own world and, even though she was friendlier, she was as pushy as always.

Gold didn’t suit Elvis’s or her brothers’ images, but Hazel had made the suggestion out of courtesy so Cordelia couldn’t bring herself to refuse it. If she thought of it as practice, then she could accept Hazel’s proposal of using gold. If she wanted to give it to them as a gift later, then she could just change it into a colour that suited them.

Cordelia set the handkerchief into the embroidery frame and passed the thread through the needle. She could only think that the design was complicated, as she looked at the sample, but she had already gotten this far, so she had to give it a go.

“Speaking of which, have you already heard about it, Cordelia-sama? Recently, there’s an interesting rumour going around near the castle.”

“An interesting rumour?”

Hazel said it as if she’d just remembered this after Cordelia had embroidered for a while.

Cordelia lifted her eyes off the white cloth and looked at Hazel.

An interesting rumour. It doesn’t ring any bells.

“Yes. A child who has a mysterious power lives near the castle. I’ve heard that her dream fortunes always come true.”

“Dream fortunes.....?”

“She predicts things from weather to lost items. She’s a girl who tells different fortunes through dreams. The commoners are all saying that it’s the second coming of the saint.”

“Oh my..... She sounds amazing.”

Cordelia sounded a little withdrawn compared to Hazel, who was excited.

I have a bad feeling about this. No, the only thing I get from this is a bad feeling.

A chill ran down her spine.

It can't be. However, at the same time, her instincts were telling her that she was spot on.

“Perhaps..... Is the girl’s name Sherry?”

“Oh my, does Cordelia-sama know the rumours after all?”

(So, it is her!)

Cordelia screamed within her mind. Her feelings were spot on, even though she had wanted to be wrong.

Sherry was the heroine in the game.

In the game, she had a unique ability, just like a heroine would. Her power allowed her to see things that she wished strongly for, in her dreams. It wasn’t something as cute as fortune-telling, but it might be better to call it a future vision. No one else with her power appeared in the game. And she might have been compared to a saint because her abilities were rare in this world.

(I thought it would be nice if I didn't meet her, but she's here after all.)

『Sherry the Dreamer』 was no doubt about the heroine 『Sherry』. She was someone who Cordelia should avoid, like the Prince.

(Of course, the death of 『Cordelia』 was because she'd reaped what she'd sowed. Still, she wouldn't have been that disarranged if she had not met the Prince and Sherry..... If I think like that, then the omen is just too much for me.)

Of course, it was possible that harm wouldn’t come to Cordelia if Sherry didn’t fall in love with the Prince, or if the Prince didn’t fall in love with Sherry. In the first place, it was too extreme for her to think that the game was the same as her life. But, even though she understood that, she couldn’t be optimistic about something that put her life on the line. There was the possibility that she could cause a misunderstanding. If she didn’t have a reason to get along with them, then she wanted to build a relationship of mutual non-interference, as far from them as possible.

(If this is the same as the game, then there's still some time before Sherry meets the Prince. Because of the dream rumour, her noble father, who had been separated from her since birth..... Earl Clyderaine found his daughter, who was living in town, and welcomed her into the House.)

Cordelia didn’t plan to get in her way if Sherry wanted to walk the path of Cinderella’s story. Cordelia would celebrate wholeheartedly if she met her fated one and had a happy ending, because if she could find happiness, then Cordelia’s path to destruction would surely perish.

Yes, I'll say it as many times as I have to. I won't get in her way. So, I want her to stay away from me.

She became depressed just by thinking about it. Of course, she didn't want to sigh out loud in front of Hazel.

However, Hazel probably thought well of Sherry, because she had brought this topic up. *I have a headache*, Cordelia thought, but, strangely enough, Hazel's tone returned to normal.

"But I don't want that kind of fortune-telling."

"Huh? Aren't you interested in it?"

Cordelia tilted her head in wonder because she had not anticipated that Hazel would say such a negative thing.

"Of course I'm interested. I like fortune-telling. Wouldn't you be interested in something like love fortunes as well?"

"Then why?"

"Because her fortunes are always spot-on. I don't want a fortune like that."

"Even if the results are good or bad?"

"That's right. For example, I'm confident that I would try my best without worrying, even if I get a bad fortune. But, if it's a good result, then I'd get too overconfident and mess up."

Cordelia was taken aback by how Hazel had said that without hesitation. Cordelia blinked and then relaxed.

"Hazel-sama, you are very strong, aren't you? It's wonderful."

"Oh my, I got complimented."

Hazel put her hand to her mouth and laughed, which also caused Cordelia to laugh.

"Say, have you talked to your Otou-sama about the future?"

"Occasionally. I'm currently learning a lot of things for the future so that I wouldn't be troubled no matter what path I decide to take."

It might have been easier for her to talk once things got started since Hazel questioned Cordelia. It was easier for Cordelia to talk about Elvis than Sherry, so she could answer quickly, and Hazel smiled when she heard that answer.

"So then, do you also talk about your engagement with your Otou-sama?"

"En-..... Engagement?"

Cordelia couldn't help but raise her voice, because she had been hit with words she hadn't expected to hear. Of course, it was apparent that an engagement would also be included in talks about the future, but that had been too sudden. The flow had accelerated a lot towards the love stories that Hazel had said they would talk about.

Cordelia lightly cleared her throat after having yelled.

“I’m sorry, we haven’t really talked about my engagement.....”

It had happened when I was three years old..... Or rather, I had been coerced into pursuing someone, but nothing else had been brought up for nearly ten years. It was probably within the statute of limitations; therefore I’m okay with not having to talk about my engagement. Cordelia pondered and fell silent..... *Instead, I’m feeling uneasy about whether it will happen or not, but it really troubles me that I haven’t heard about it from Otou-sama.*

“I’ve heard from Otou-sama that you would marry Vernoux-sama or His Highness the Crown Prince.”

“..... Vernoux-sama is the son of that Marquis Flantheim. He wouldn’t marry anyone except for the person he loves. His Highness is also a revered person.”

The first half of her speech was filled with heartfelt words, but the second half was filled with her hopes.

Also, she was a little surprised that Hazel had included Vernoux’s name so calmly after she’d just shown that much hostility towards Cordelia. However, it didn’t seem like she was looking for anything. *She might just switch over really fast..... But isn’t this too fast?*

Hazel heard Cordelia’s answer and smiled.

“I have a lot of things I want to do.”

“Like what?”

“To fall in love, compete with my rivals and to be happy with my first love. Of course, there’s a possibility that I won’t have any rivals at all, but it would only be natural to have rivals if the person I love is such a wonderful person. But, I’ll just have to better myself even if rivals appear. I won’t lose!”

Hazel put her hands to her cheeks and sighed.

Well, I don’t know if Vernoux-sama is a wonderful person or not, but a lot of ladies are attracted to him. The person, himself, always complains that they always ask him about the Crown Prince, but he is the heir of a Marquis House. Also, he had great features and would become a beauty in a few years.

“Do you also have someone you love, Cordelia-sama?”

“Not specifically..... But well..... Let’s see.....”

Her reply seemed as if it was going to fade, but it was enough for Hazel to hear.

“For example, Gille-sama, whom you talked about the other day.”

“Gille-sama is a friend.”

“..... That was a quick response. But don’t you think that feeling could be turned into love? Isn’t it lovely to imagine love between..... childhood friends??”

“.....”

Cordelia couldn't imagine it, even if she was asked whether it was nice or not. And she worried about whether she was extremely rude to Gille, for imagining something like that. She would be riddled with guilt whenever she wrote letters to Gille if she dared to even imagine it. She wouldn't know how to act the next time she saw him. She couldn't do that to a friend.

Cordelia tried to convince herself, *no, it won't happen.*

In contrast to Cordelia, Hazel was smiling. She put the half-finished bluebird onto the table and put her hands together as if she was praying.

"My parents only met three times before their marriage. But, they're on good terms and have a wonderful relationship."

Hazel continued.

"There are few noble ladies, and most of them have their fiancés decided for them at birth. I'm not opposed to that, but I long for love. I'm extremely happy that I was allowed to have my first love."

Hazel, who cast her eyes down a little, looked unusually like a lady right now.

Then she said, "And if possible....." and stared straight at Cordelia.

"I also want to be like the heroine in a novel. I want to give my all in love and have a happily ever after. The grace period isn't that long, and I don't want to abandon the possibility that Vernoux-sama will fall in love with me. So, I'll continue to do my best."

Cordelia smiled wryly as Hazel declared that. *It's nice that she's putting in the effort, but it's also true that her seriousness is what is putting Vernoux-sama off. It's difficult to find balance in this world,* she couldn't help but think. At the same time, when Cordelia saw Hazel like that, she couldn't help but think that Vernoux should be able to get rid of the bad impression he has of her. Hazel usually..... gave off a rude and shameless impression, but today she was quiet and gave off a strong impression.

"This is actually the first time I've talked to someone like this."

"Why me?"

"I thought you would have the same circumstances as me, do you not? We are both daughters of Earl Houses, and I thought we would understand each other. We're also best friends."

Hazel winked and took the cloth into her hands once again before embroidering.

"I wish that you have a wonderful experience."

"Then, I'll also wish that you'll be satisfied."

"Thank you very much. But, I won't ask for your help. This is my battle."

Cordelia was relieved to hear those words, but she also felt bad at the same time. She also wanted to be considerate of Vernoux's feelings, because she was his friend as well. However, Hazel acted based on her beliefs, and Cordelia did want to help her if she asked for it. So she was extremely grateful that she didn't have to worry about choosing between them..... But, it was a little complicated after all. It was

extremely excruciating that she wasn't able to do anything for Hazel, who was acting this honest, even though they were both from Earl Houses.

"Hazel-sama."

"What is it?"

"If anything happens, then the least I can do is listen to you."

Cordelia said that and Hazel smiled in satisfaction. Then she said, "Eventually."

Cordelia didn't ask Hazel anything else after that. There was something she had to finish before she asked another question, ——— which was to progress in the embroidery at hand.

She already knew that the design would be complicated from the beginning, but it was a lot harder than she thought it would be when she'd started embroidering; it was enough for her to want to change the design, had Hazel not been watching. But, she wouldn't give up, even if no one was watching her. Cordelia convinced herself that her dignity as a lady would be damaged if she escaped from the formidable enemy known as embroidery.

"..... I also have to try hard, so that Otou-sama can be proud of me."

No matter how hard she tried at her research, her skills as a lady were still average. She might be treated as an eccentric lady if that part of her was damaged, even if her research did bear fruit.

I can't raise a white flag in a place like this, she motivated herself, which caused Hazel to tilt her head in curiosity.

"Oh my, there are many wonderful rumours about you, Cordelia-sama. I'm sure your Otou-sama is proud."

"That would be nice if it were true..... I don't think Otou-sama would be proud of me if I don't have more pride in myself. I still don't think I'm there yet."

"Cordelia-sama, you don't seem like such a weak person that you can't proud of yourself. Because you're my eternal rival."

"..... I really don't know what kind of person I am to you, Hazel-sama."

However, Cordelia understood that Hazel acknowledged her that much. She smiled wryly, in a shy way.

And, she felt that having someone acknowledging you was a pleasant feeling.

◆◆◆◆◆

Afterwards, the two continued embroidering while drinking tea. Dinner was brought in when it became dark outside, they ate it.

Compared to the Pameradia House, the Hale House had a lot of dishes which brought out flavours by combining minced meat and fish. It was different from the food cooked at the Pameradia House, which

placed importance on drawing out the tastes of the ingredients themselves, but it was similar to stewed hamburger from her previous world. According to what she'd heard, this was traditional food of the people who lived in the Hale fief.

Other food included flowers and leaves crafted and placed on vegetables and fruits. They were well plated. It was a shame to have to eat them.

(I also like classic plating, but this is also gorgeous and nice.)

Cordelia thought that and suddenly felt that things like that would be popular amongst young women.

At the same time, she thought that if she made the aroma candles, which she had brought as a present today, pleasing to the eyes, then she could add value to it.

It was scented, but she hadn't made any while thinking about the appearance. It just looked like a candle.

She probably couldn't take the time to decorate each candle, one by one, like the vegetables and fruits on the table, if she wanted to distribute a lot in the future. But it would be possible if the design was simple, and it would be fun to mix fancy ones for appropriately priced sets. Appealing both the sight and smell would lead to more interest.

Something else popped into her mind when she thought of that.

(But, shape and smell, huh. It might be a little difficult with candles, but I might be able to do something else with soap. For example, opening up a soap carving class, with really fragrant soaps.)

We can carve soap to make a variety of shapes, like 3D flowers, leaves and confectionery motifs, while enjoying the aromas. The only thing needed is a knife. The finished product would be suited for display inside, and it might be accepted as a new pastime.

If I spread such learning, then I might be able to expand my own information network. Soft soap can be carved by ladies' hands. And two things wouldn't be made exactly the same, just like embroidery.

I don't know whether it would work or not, but I think I'll have soft soap developed when I get home and ask the blacksmith to make a prototype carving knife. Unlike with plants, which are my speciality, soap carving was only a part of my hobby in my past life. I would need to hone my skills to be accepted as a noble with experienced eyes. This might take a long time.

(For now, I'll try to carve it first and see what reactions I get from Nirupama-obasama and Aisha-sama.)

Also, if I get a good response, then I can see if it catches the attention of Marchioness Sara. I don't have anything to lose, even if things don't go as planned.

She thought as she looked at the vegetables. Thus Hazel thought that the vegetables were the reason behind her smile. Hazel looked at Cordelia and said contently.

"I'm a little surprised that Cordelia likes the meal at my house, that much."

Cordelia's chest hurt a little since such innocent words were spoken to her, while she was thinking about other things, but she was able to come up with different ideas because she was looking at the food. And, the food was delicious.

Cordelia smiled back at Hazel.

"I thought that it was important to experience many things after all. The dishes are very well thought up, and it feels very fresh."

However, Hazel pouted at those words.

"The dishes at my house are indeed fancy and very delicious. But, I think that it's fine for them to keep the dishes in the original forms a bit more. I like Bagna càuda, but it would definitely not be served at my house. I can only eat it when I go to visit Okaa-sama's family."

"Then, please come to eat at my house next time. I'll tell the chef."

"Really? I can't wait!"

And Cordelia, who had stuffed her stomach with the last dish available; a raspberry and pistachio mousse, was finally able to open up to Hazel..... Or so she thought, but when she thought about it thoroughly, the sleepover was only just beginning.

Yes, it's finally time for the girls talk that I've been dreading. We talked a lot at lunchtime but judging from what Hazel-sama said, that was only a warmup. The real conversation starts at night. Cordelia thought.

However, as soon as she'd finished eating, Hazel said something that Cordelia had not anticipated, "I'm a little tired today."

Cordelia didn't stop her. *If Hazel-sama is tired, then she should rest*, Cordelia thought and smiled, "Then we can talk another time." Hazel looked apologetic as she replied, "I'll take you up on that."

Cordelia, who had avoided her biggest concern, was able to welcome the night in relief. However, she had failed and missed her timing to give the aroma candle to Hazel, because she was feeling too relieved. But, she could just give it to her before she left. *I have tomorrow*, she thought and slowly sat on the bed since she was now alone.

There had been a lot of shocking things, but the chance to experience different things was valuable.

However, it seemed like tonight was going to be a long night since she no longer had anything to do. The only thing she had to do before going to bed was wipe her body with warm water. Hazel had told her that she could do that at any time if she called a servant with the bell in her room.

Now then, what should I do? It's not bad to get plenty of sleep either.

She pondered and heard the clunk of something small hitting the window.

Was that my imagination? She thought and heard the same sound again after a while.

What the heck is that?

Cordelia slowly approached the window, leading to the balcony. She put her hand on it and peeked outside. Then, she saw two pebbles. They were small, but felt really out of place, since there wasn't any rubbish in sight. She opened the window and stepped outside to pick one up. The pebble felt really nice to the touch. She rolled it in her fingers and tilted her head in confusion.

It was beautiful enough for her to want to take it home, but it really didn't belong there.

She was so distracted by it that she hadn't noticed at all.

"Good evening, Dilly."

It was a voice she knew well, and he had utterly hidden his presence as he lent against the wall.

She dropped the pebble in her hand and stiffly moved her head in the direction of the voice. And the voice that she had let out sounded extremely awkward.

"..... Why are you here Gille-sama?"

Act 20: The Small Starry Sky

Cordelia couldn't help but ask, since she was stunned by her friend, who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere..... But, she became speechless once again when she saw what he looked like.

She knew it was Gille from his voice, but she didn't know why he was dressed like that.

“A fox mask.....?”



She had never seen a mask like that in this world before. However, she recognised the white fox mask with red borders around its eyes. She felt it was a bit different from the ones she had in her memories, but it was close to a Japanese fox mask. *It's probably not something that was made in this kingdom. But why is Gille-sama wearing such a thing?* It was really odd for him to wear a fox mask while they were surrounded by western things.

Cordelia stared at Gille, but she couldn't see what kind of face he was making beneath the mask. She predicted that he was probably laughing, because his shoulders were shaking a little. *Is this the time for you to be laughing? No, it definitely is not.*

"..... You're trespassing, Gille-sama."

Yes, the fact that he suddenly appeared, the fox mask, and how he got onto the 2nd floor..... those problems remained, even if she decided not to think about anything else.

He slowly removed his mask when she had said that in shock.

"I didn't enter without permission. I came here on an errand to deliver something to Earl Hale. I just haven't gone home yet."

He looked very calm after he'd removed his mask.

However, Hazel's voice once again replayed in her head when she saw his expression.

『Does Cordelia-sama and..... your friend, have the same feelings?』

『Isn't it lovely to imagine love between..... childhood friends?』

Cordelia tried desperately not to choke and passed it off as a cough.

"Dilly?"

"I'm sorry, I want to ask this as a reference..... But how long ago did you finish your business?"

"It's a bit of a secret."

Cordelia concluded that it was the same as trespassing, judging from the way Gille was avoiding the question. Even if he did get permission to enter the mansion, they probably assumed that he had already left.

What is he doing, this boy?

Cordelia looked at him as if he was being shady, and he quickly added.

"I heard from Vernoux that you were staying at this mansion. I plan to go home as soon as I'm done."

"I see..... Did you think I would understand, and say something like that? I don't even know how you found me in this room."

The mansion was massive. He wouldn't have been able to find her easily, even if he knew that she was staying there.

But, Gille quickly answered that question.

“It’s not hard. Your magic is really similar to the forest, so it’s easy to follow.”

“Excuse me?”

“If it’s someone I’ve met before..... That’s right, I can find them straight away as long as they aren’t hiding their presence. If they are, then I could only sense that something feels out of place.”

Gille said it nonchalantly, but Cordelia was surprised.

“..... That’s a very advanced skill.”

Even Cordelia knew that it wasn’t magic that a child could use. The magicians at the Pameradia House used it as a part of their job, but it was something that only an expert did. *Is Gille-sama an expert in magic?*

Cordelia stared at Gille, and he averted his gaze.

“I had to hone my skills so that I could sneak out of home. I’m sensitive to the presence of others because I can’t sneak out if others see me.”

“I see..... So, you’re also good at hiding your presence.”

She didn’t know whether he was a magician or not, but she was dumbfounded that he honed his skill for such a ridiculous reason; but she understood that this motive was really appropriate for his age. Humans were beings who went after what they wanted..... Although it was a little too grand for her to agree with it, the first time she had met him was in town. Although, she felt that it wouldn’t be surprising for Gille to do unconventional things, since he was Vernoux’s friend.

After she concluded that, the only question she had left was about the mask in his hand.

“You’re holding a very peculiar mask today.”

Gille looked at the mask and moved it so that it lightly covered his face.

“My family recently hired a very sharp person. Unlike before, he could find me, even if I hide my presence, so I wear it when I sneak out, as insurance. He still doesn’t know I have this mask after all.”

“..... I think you stand out more if you wear something like that.”

“I actually don’t. Well, that’s only if I hide my presence. It looks basically transparent to him, as long as I don’t tell him to pay attention to me, since he doesn’t recognise it. That’s what Vernoux told me the first time I wore this mask, and hid my presence, when I went to meet him.”

Gille laughed mischievously. It had been a lie that he didn’t know how to move around incognito, when she first met him. Even if it had been four years since then, he had gotten better at sneaking out.

“..... So, where did you get that mask from?”

“The market.”

“Market?”

“The Founding Festival is approaching, and a lot of caravans come to the Royal Capital. They have a lot of rare things. I bought this.”

Cordelia was surprised by those words.

The caravans that came to the Royal Capital. Of course, that wasn't the first time she had heard of it. Caravans weren't the only thing that came when the Founding Festival was on; troupes, storytellers, street performers and artisans also came. The land near the castle became a very popular tourist location, at that time.

As a result, Elvis and Isma became busier than usual. There was an increase in defence and allocation work. Cordelia acted more docile than normal, because she didn't want to get in the way of her busy father and brothers, thus she had never been to the Founding Festival before.

She was interested in the festival and the caravans. However, she persuaded herself that she saw something similar whenever she went to inspect the fief, even if she couldn't go out in the Royal Capital. *Ertiga is a large commercial area, so the goods that appear there don't differ much from those that appear in the Royal Capital*, she convinced herself.

But what was the reality? Gille was holding something that she had never seen before. *The people who visit the Royal Capital are different from those who visit our fief.*

But even if she knew that, Elvis and Isma's work wouldn't decrease more than usual, so she had no choice but to give up on it.

(I wonder if the world I can see when I grow up will be vaster.)

She wanted to grow up faster when she thought that. But, at the same time, she also felt something which contradicted that, which was 『I still want to be immersed in my research as a child』.

Gille, who ventured openly around the Royal Capital, seemed sly to her, now that her feelings were whirling around.

"I heard that you were busy, but you seem unexpectedly free."

It was wrong for her to take it out on Gille, but she couldn't help but curse him. Gille smiled wryly at her and coughed before changing the topic.

"The reason why I'm here is..... That I heard that it was hard for you to go out at night, so I brought..... this with me. I really wanted to show it to you."

He said as he held up a small flower pot from his feet; it had a tree in it, which was a cubit long. The tree had small white flowers blooming on it. Cordelia recognised the flower.

"Jasmine.....?"

"Ah, so you know this flower after all."

"I do, but I couldn't find it at all. The books didn't write about where it grew. Gille-sama, where did you get this from?"

"From Star Falling Hill. It's quiet there, and the scenery is amazing, so I wanted to show it to you, Dilly."

I see, so the stars weren't the only thing Gille-sama wanted to show me; he wanted me to see this flower too. I don't think I can go but inviting me to see the stars is enticing enough. And now that I see this flower, I really want to go there.

I want to go. Stars and flowers. I want to see them both. And if possible, I want to bring a large amount of stock back with me. She received the flowerpot and gazed at it while thinking strongly.

Of course, one could enjoy the scent that came from essential oils made from jasmine, but it could also be turned into a compress for skincare, muscle pain and rheumatic pain. But, there was a drawback. Jasmine had a low oil extraction rate, like roses. Therefore, it was impossible to extract essential oils from one bundle.

However, she couldn't hide the fact that she was happy that Gille had delivered her this flowerpot.

What should I do? Where should I start? No, I don't need to think about it. I should first increase my stock. It's impossible for me to get essential oils without the appropriate amount. But, my greenhouse is already full. It would be fine with just one tree, but where should I go if I want to increase it?

Gille looked at Cordelia in satisfaction and laughed.

"Actually, that wasn't all I came for today..... I also brought this. It's difficult for it to grow in this kingdom, because of winter, but I thought that you could grow it in your greenhouse."

"Aloe Vera?"

"..... You really know a lot about plants."

Cordelia widened her eyes in surprise, and Gille laughed a little weirdly.

However, she didn't care about that at all, because Aloe Vera was much more important to her. Aloe Vera couldn't just be used to cure burns, it could also be changed into a lotion if you scraped the gel and put it on low heat. Of course, the lotion was also compatible with Jasmine.

"Did you also find this at the caravan? It doesn't grow in winter, so it's not a plant from this kingdom, right? So, caravans also sell wonderful things like this?"

"No, I got this from someone I know. There's a researcher who knows about the effects of this grass, and she went through a lot to import it privately..... I don't know if it was because of the balance between the temperature or magic, but most of them withered. She had obtained a lot of them, but this is her last pot. She felt bad because they had all withered, so she gave it away in hopes that someone could grow it."

"..... Is she perhaps someone you know?"

"Yeah. Is it surprising?"

"Yes."

Cordelia nodded frankly at Gille, who looked like a mischievous child.

"I met her by chance, but she's really kind and interesting. I started calling her sensei, so she coaches me sometimes."

“What is her name?”

“I don’t know her real name, but she’s called the 『Green Witch』 . She lives in the Royal Capital.”

“.....”

“I can tell, even if you don’t make that face. You want to meet her too, right Dilly?”

Cordelia’s shoulders jumped a little. He had hit the mark. It was even fine to say that he had hit it dead centre.

She was a little indecisive, because she thought it was imprudent, but it seemed like she could meet the researcher, who was interested in Aloe Vera, soon. Besides, this sensei might know more about the herbs that Cordelia was interested in.

Gille looked at Cordelia, who was conflicted, and smiled.

“You don’t have to worry about it. Sensei said that she wanted to meet the girl who seemed interested in Aloe Vera. I will guide you to her if it’s convenient for you. If it’s in the afternoon..... Oh yeah, it’s possible for you to leave your house if you say that you have something to do with Vernoux, right?”

“That should be alright..... But, you’re busy, aren’t you Gille-sama? Vernoux-sama told me you were.”

“It’s fine. There are days when I can’t sneak out, but if I do my work properly then it shouldn’t be a problem. Besides, it gets stuffy if I just stay in my house, and my head also goes mushy. Well, I’ll still have to sneak out though.”

He said it jokingly, while laughing a little, and Cordelia got worried again. She wanted to meet this sensei, if Gille said it was fine. It was also easier for Cordelia to go out after the Founding Festival.

But, that was only if she wasn’t alone.

“..... Gille-sama, would it be possible for Ronnie to come along?”

“Ronnie?”

“Yes. He’s a magician at our house. He also helps me with my research. He’s also my guard.”

The person who she could loosen up with, while outside, was definitely Ronnie.

He was flexible, and she was sure that he would have fun if he met the researcher.

But would Gille-sama, who was hiding his true self, be fine with a stranger accompanying us? He even goes out of his way to get Vernoux-sama to change his appearance. He might be opposed to showing his appearance to others, even if it isn’t his real one.

Gille frowned for a second at Cordelia’s question, and then he instantly relaxed.

“I don’t mind. It should be fine if it’s someone you chose.”

“It’s fine for you to say no, you know?”

“No, it’s fine. I’m not bothered by it.”

“But.....”

“You don’t have to worry about it.”

So why did you frown before? She thought, but Gille had insisted.

“..... Are you really okay with it?”

“Of course.”

Cordelia asked once more, just to be sure, and Gille immediately replied. If so, then she probably didn’t have to hold back.

“Then, please let me meet her after the Founding Festival.”

“Okay. Now onto the last thing I wanted to do. You might be disappointed, but this flower wasn’t the last thing I wanted to show you. I wanted to show you my handiwork.”

He said that as he showed her a black box, which looked like it could fit in his palm.

“This is?”

It looked just like a normal box. If she had to describe it more, then it looked like a solid box. It was probably made from metal.

But she couldn’t tell what it was used for.

Cordelia glanced at the box and then at Gille.

“.....”

“Gille-sama?”

“Sorry, Dilly. My terrible lack of a plan has been exposed.

“Huh?”

Plan? What does that have to do with the box?

Cordelia questioned that in her mind, and Gille spoke awkwardly.

“This, it doesn’t activate, unless we’re inside a room..... Mm.....”

Cordelia understood his vague words.

I see. This must be some kind of machine, since he said it needed to be activated. And it seems like this could only be used inside, but of course he would hesitate, since a small gentleman and a small lady are going to go into a room, at a time when the sun has already set.

(He’s being careless, even though he’s aware of it..... It makes him seem kind of cute.)

Cordelia stepped back and revealed the way to the room.

“I don’t mind if you come in. Of course, I don’t think it would be fine for Earl Hale to know about this.”

Of course, it probably wouldn't turn into something troublesome, since Gille seemed hesitant to enter.

(But Gille-sama did say that he interacted with Earl Hale.)

Who on earth is he? She always thought that she didn't mind, but the doubt in her mind deepened every time she received more information about him.

"I'll think about it more next time."

Gille entered the room without knowing that Cordelia was doubting him. However, he was probably still showing restraint. He sat down by the window. Even though it was still inside of the room, he was sitting at the very corner.

Then he placed the black box onto the floor and fiddled with the inside. A gentle light spilled out from within the box.

"Is this a lamp?"

"It's not a lamp..... I'm going to close the curtains for a bit. Is it okay if you dim the room a little?"

"Yes. It's fine."

As long as the lamp was lit, then it would be fine for her to dim the room. Gille closed the curtains when he heard Cordelia's reply.

She dimmed the light in the room, and the light that shone through the box got even brighter. The light swayed and flickered, just like a candle.

I wonder what's going to happen. She looked at Gille. He looked somewhat stiff. He was probably nervous, like he'd mentioned earlier, in a small voice.

Then, he closed his eyes and stood the box up; he put his hands on top of one another and muttered.

"Drop of light, soar."

The light sprayed out of the box, like water droplets, as if invited by Gille's words.

Cordelia widened her eyes. It was so beautiful that she didn't realise that it had captivated her. She knelt down and approached the box, as if it was inviting her to come closer. In the meantime, a bright, gentle light continued to flood from the box.

She didn't know for how long it would continue.

But, the light settled down at the end, like sparklers, and disappeared.

However, the room didn't become dark. No, the inside of the room was indeed dark. However, there was enough light for her to see the box, even though the curtains were closed. It would make sense if moonlight had entered through the window, but that was impossible with the curtains closed.

This is odd, she thought, as she raised her face and her eyes met Gille's, whose features were illuminated by pale light. Then, she noticed a lot of sparkling lights behind him.

It wasn't just behind him; lights were floating around everywhere in the room.

“..... Are those stars?”

“Yeah. I was wondering if I could bring it with me, so I made this. This is this season’s midnight sky.”

Gille spoke in a slightly embarrassing way, and then he quickly added in a whisper, “That box stores the positional relationships of the stars.” The stars really made her feel a sense of perspective, and they looked as if they were shining in a place she couldn’t reach.

“Gille-sama, you said this was your handiwork, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, because I wanted Dilly to see it.”

“This isn’t just handiwork, isn’t it the creation of a magic tool?”

“It’s not that amazing. I used ancient magic as reference, but it’s still just only a kid’s toy compared to the really handy magic tools.”

“Of course, it’s amazing. I’ve never heard of such a gadget, nor would I have been able to come up with it.”

New magic tools were rarely produced, because it was difficult to control the creation process. If anything, it was even difficult to reproduce ready-made products. Therefore, it wasn’t an easy task to create new magic tools. Gille might have meant that it wasn’t a household product, thus it was a toy, but he was wrong. Such a thing didn’t change how difficult it was to make.

Gille chuckled. He seemed somewhat embarrassed.

“The stars have been watching this world for a long time. So, when I look up at the stars, I feel like I have to live in a way that wouldn’t make them feel ashamed.”

“So, is that why you like stars?”

“Yeah. And besides.....”

He stopped mid-sentence, and Cordelia tilted her head in curiosity.

“What is it?”

But Gille shook his head side to side.

“..... Nothing. I’ll stop for now.”

“Is it a secret?”

“It is. At least for now.”

“..... Okay. But, please tell me about the stars instead. I finally have the chance to see this beautiful night sky, after all.”

She wasn’t thinking of forcing him to answer..... Or rather, she felt like he wouldn’t answer even if she tried to get the answer out of him. Gille was gentle, but he was also someone who learnt a high-level skill, just for going incognito. He probably wasn’t someone who would change his mind easily once he had decided on something. Besides, he had said, “Now,” so he would probably tell her about it when he felt like it. Therefore, she wanted to hear about the shining stars.

Gille's eyes sparkled, and then he narrowed his eyes and pointed at a light.

"Well..... Let's start with the red star floating in the West and the blue star floating in the East. You see, it's this star and that star. They look like they're a pair, don't they? They're called the twin stars. It is said that the Goddesses of Beauty live on these stars, but they always argue over who's older."

"What's with that?"

"They probably get along really well. If they didn't, then they wouldn't quarrel like that."

"That may be true."

"I'll tell you about the Stellar Sea Eagle next. It's the star next to the red star. The Stellar Sea Eagle has his eyes on the Sand Fish in front of him. He declared that he would court the Red Star, if he catches the Sand Fish."

Gille spoke, as his hands glided in the air. Then, the stars were connected by lines of light and the constellations were coloured in a way that was easy to understand.

"Isn't the Sand Fish bigger than the Stellar Sea Eagle? It looks like it's very hard to catch."

"You're right. But, his beak is very sharp. So, I'm sure he would be able to catch it."

Gille suddenly swung his finger around like a baton, and the lines connecting the stars disappeared.

He surveyed the stars as if he was pondering, and then he said, "Next is that," before connecting the stars again.

"The Sea God Star, to the south, is home to the only god that has ever set foot to soil. It is said that he longed for the sea so much that he called all the stars together to make one. And what they made was a colourful heavenly road..... The River of the Stars. A lot of the gods and goddesses were happy about that, but the Stellar Sea Eagle said that it was hard to catch the Sand Fish and resented the Sea God a lot for it."

"Oh my..... It's also difficult to maintain balance in the heavens."

"It is. The idea of everyone accepting something, just because a lot of people like it, definitely doesn't exist in this world. But that's why I think that..... The Sea God is trying to see if they could compromise with each other. I don't think it's useless to look for the possibility, even if they can't solve the problem completely, because the Sea God seems very wise..... Well, it resulted in them quarrelling with each other though."

Gille said that while looking up at the stars and smiling wryly.

She could tell that the tension he had felt when he had first entered the room was gone. He was enthusiastically looking up at the stars.

Cordelia muttered.

"You really love stars a lot."

Gille returned her statement with a smile.

He looked back at the small sky and lightly fluttered his hand.

“The last star I want to tell you about is my favourite. The star located slightly north of the centre is called 『The Eye of the Lion』 ; it's in the middle of the Heavenly King, the Lion King constellation. And it guides people at night. The Lion King is..... Like this I guess. And there's a similar line of stars near it. It's smaller than the Lion King..... the Young Lion constellation; which is considered to be the Lion King's son. I'm sure you know this Dilly, but it has the same name as the young knights of this kingdom.”

Gille, who had been standing up until now, spoke as he lowered to his knees, and looked up at the sky, to show his respect.

“The Young Lion admired his father, the King. He respected his esteemed father and believed that he would someday become the same type of King as his father is, if he kept on doing the right thing. However, he was narrow-minded. Well, that wasn't all. He was a child who was only chasing after the false image he had of his father. Thus, he had the possibility of becoming a foolish king. The one who stopped the Young Lion was the star in front of him.”

“In front of him..... That small star?”

“Yes. It's small, but it's shining brightly, isn't it? That star is called the 『Guiding Oracle』 . The Oracle said this to the Young Lion, 『If you want to be like the Lion King, then you must have the power to attract people like he does. But you still don't have that appeal.』

“She really..... Made that clear to him, didn't she?”

“She's cool, right? I really love this story; because I thought that I had to brace myself and I couldn't lose.”

Gille sat down as if he was relaxing, and then reached up to the sky. Of course, his hand didn't reach the light; it was only illuminated by the starlight.

“Don't.....”

“Mm?”

“Please don't aim too high.”

It hadn't been that long since they'd started talking. Even so, she felt as if Gille was acting more mature than his real age. She remembered that day, before she started exchanging letters with him, four years ago; he had rushed out to protect a girl. He was polite, and he had a strong sense of justice, but her impression of him was just that of a simple-minded boy.

But, he was quiet today, and gave off a strong impression. At the same time, she felt that he wanted to grow up, and that he was in a rush to do so.

“What's wrong?”

Gille tilted his head curiously, probably because he hadn't expected her to say that. Cordelia hesitated a little and then frankly said.

“Because it’s lonely, isn’t it? Once we become adults, we probably wouldn’t get as many opportunities to exchange letters, or to meet like this. So, please don’t rush. There will come a time when we have no choice but to grow up.”

She spoke in a jokingly way, but most of it was true. Of course, Cordelia was confused by some things, and there were times when she wanted to become an adult; so, it might have been unfair of her to say that to him.

But, unlike Cordelia, it didn’t seem like Gille had any lingering regrets at being a child.

(Somehow, it feels like I’m being left behind.)

And she felt lonely for some reason.

And, then there was something else. She thought that the way Gille acted four years ago was cool, even though she would never say that aloud, because it was embarrassing. Of course, he might not change how he behaved, even if he became an adult. However, the reason why he went to help the girl without hesitation, at that time, was probably because he was an innocent child who wasn’t swayed by reason. She felt that the reason why she was lonely was because his principles might change if he suddenly became an adult. Of course, Cordelia understood that those were just her own selfish thoughts.

She felt an uncomfortable silence cover the room. *Would things go back to normal if I tell him I’m joking?* Gille muttered the moment she thought that.

“Would you really..... feel lonely?”

“Huh?”

“No, if that’s the case..... Then.....”

Is it simply the light’s influence that he is turning slightly red? It didn’t sound as if Gille was asking Cordelia a question, it sounded as if it had just come out. Then he covered his mouth with his hand, and she heard something that sounded like a mutter; but she couldn’t make out what he was saying at all.

“I’m sorry, could you say that again?”

“No, it’s nothing. Oh right, I have to go home soon..... Can we meet again? I’ll send you a letter.”

“Huh? Yes. Thank you very much.”

She also stood up slowly after Gille happily stood up. The window was already right behind him. They weren’t far enough for her to see him out. Cordelia suddenly remembered when Gille took a step out onto the balcony.

“Gille-sama, please wait.”

“What is it?”

She confirmed that he had stopped, and then rushed to the table by the window. She picked up the lion embroidery that she had threaded in the afternoon.

“Please take this with you. It wasn’t embroidered very well, but it’s a lion. It’s a little flashy..... But it’s my thanks for today.”

Cordelia placed the handkerchief that she had finished embroidering earlier that day into Gille’s hand, which he had stuck out on reflex. She was drawn to the other yarns more than gold at that time, but now she was glad that she had embroidered it with a thread that was the same colour as the stars. She was a little thankful towards Hazel, who had suggested the design.

There was one thing that she was worried about, even if she didn’t worry about the colour or design. Which was her own skill.

It wasn’t like she was bad, but she couldn’t say that she was good either. She saw with her own eyes that Hazel was better at embroidering than her. But even so, she thought that her handiwork would make Gille a little bit happy, if he liked lions. Of course, she was a little embarrassed. Her handiwork couldn’t be compared to the small starry sky that Gille had given her.

Gille froze with the handkerchief in hand.

(I wonder if I should have embroidered something a bit nicer on it and gave it to him later, after all.....)

Cordelia had trouble looking up because he hadn’t moved his hand. She could raise her face if he could just at least say something..... But the silence continued.

(Could he be..... shocked?)

It’s not that bad, or so she wanted to think. Cordelia gradually became uneasy in the silence.

(..... This can’t go on.)

Cordelia made up her mind and raised her face. *If this silence is going to continue, then I don’t even mind if he says it’s bad.....* She was fuelled by that thought.

Gille, who was reflected in her eyes, remained frozen on the spot, with his eyes wide open as he stared at the handkerchief in his hand. He looked just like a stone statue.

“..... Gille-sama?”



She understood that he wasn't disgusted, and that he was simply frozen on the spot. His shoulders started shaking after Cordelia asked her question, and he was no longer petrified. At the same time, he spread the handkerchief in his hand, and stared at it as if he was devouring it.

"..... Errm?"

"Th-thanks.....! I was extremely, surprised. I'm really, happy."

He covered his mouth with both his hands, as soon as he said that, and turned away from her. She knew that he was extremely happy. So happy, that even she was getting embarrassed.

"..... I, I'll give you a new one once I get a little better at embroidering."

She concluded that she had made the right choice in giving it to him, since he was that happy about it, but at the same time, she also thought that it hadn't been made that well.

However, Gille looked at her as if she had just said something outrageous.

"No, I won't give this back to you."

"Why not?"

"It's mine."

Cordelia was dumbfounded for a second at how boldly and clearly Gille had stated that. He put his hand behind his back to declare that he wasn't giving it back to her, and the handkerchief disappeared from her field of vision.

"..... Then I'll give up on the idea of giving you something else."

Him liking it that much meant that he was fine with that handkerchief. Cordelia didn't understand it very well, but she didn't need to snatch it from him if he said that it was fine with him. It was impossible for her to get it back from him in the first place.

But, Gille choked when Cordelia said that, "Oof." His eyes wandered all over the place, and his attitude was different from before; he looked as if he couldn't make up his mind. Cordelia wouldn't help but burst into laughter.

"Dilly."

"Yes?"

"Thanks for today. I hope to see you soon."

He spoke as he turned his back towards her and this time, he jumped off the balcony and disappeared.

His figure overlapped with the one she saw at the evening party and, at the same time, she felt that she had grown used to seeing it. *Does him improving in a short time mean that he'd only recently started sneaking out from high places? Of course, I don't have the skills to confirm this.*

The aura around her hadn't changed much, even though Gille had left, because he had little presence to start with. But, she certainly felt a sense of stillness around her when she could no longer see him or hear his voice. She could clearly hear the sounds of the curtains.

She gasped when she heard that sound.

“Dammit. What’s the matter with me.....! I forgot to ask Gille-sama why he’s interested in medicinal herbs, and what he was being taught.”

I’ll ask him next time we meet.

Cordelia said that as she slowly closed the window.

The stars were still shining brightly in the room.

Extra: A Holiday for Ms. Who Caught a Cold

“Then, Ojou-sama, let’s finish it here for today.”

“Alright.”

After Cordelia had finished with her history lesson, and saw her tutor off, she felt as if her eyes were getting blurry and rubbed them. But, when she opened her eyes again, her vision returned to normal, and she couldn’t feel anything odd about it.

“It must be my imagination,” she reflected, and went to have lunch without a care. However, she strangely had no appetite and, in the end, she barely touched her food.

“..... I wonder, if it’s a cold.”

She whispered that to herself, and a shout came from behind her.

“WHAT?!” The owner of that voice was Ronnie.

“Ronnie, what’s wrong?”

“Because, Ojou-sama, just now, you said cold, didn’t you?”

“Yes. I’m feeling a little off. I wonder if I should rest.”

Cordelia tilted her head at Ronnie, who suddenly lost his complexion.

“Are you okay? You look worse than me.....”

“Well..... What am I saying? Please rest. Ojou-sama is still a child..... Huh, Ojou-sama?!”

I feel like his voice is so far away, even though he’s being so loud, she thought, as her vision faded into blackness.

◆◆◆◆◆

“..... Have you awoken?”

“Emina.....? This..... is my room, isn’t it?”

“Yes. Ojou-sama has caught a cold.”

Emina spoke as she placed a pitcher on the side table. *Perhaps, she has medicine too.*

But, this is just a cold. I collapsed the moment I realized that I had a cold, so I wasn’t planning on not taking care of myself.

“..... It’s just a cold, isn’t it?”

“Yes. But Ojou-sama is still not an adult.”

“I have a feeling Ronnie said the same thing before I collapsed.”

You don't have to treat me like that much of a child.

She thought that, but Emina must have seen right through her.

“Ojou-sama has a lot of magic power, so it's easier for you to take a turn for the worse. First, please drink this medicine.”

She listened to Emina as she recalled, *come to think of it, I've heard that before.*

She hadn't been sick, ever since she had caught that disease when she was three, but apparently, she would become like this, even from a cold, because of how high her magic power was. She once again realized that having a lot of magic power wasn't always a good thing. Cordelia drank her medicine with Emina's help.

The salty taste of the medicine spread throughout her mouth. Frankly speaking, it was bad.

“You probably won't catch a cold once your body is steady enough. Besides, Ojou-sama has overcome a great disease. That's why, you'll be able get well soon, if you rest properly.”

“Really?”

“Yes, that was what the doctor said. But, you will be having another medical exam.”

Apparently the doctor had already examined her, so she probably didn't have too much to worry about. But she had a feeling that her body felt more sluggish than it did when she was in the greenhouse.

“Will I get better in 3 days?”

I would hate it if I don't, Cordelia thought while speaking, but Emina opened her eyes in surprise.

“Emina?”

“Well..... Ojou-sama, the doctor said that you would probably get better in 10 days.”

“Eeh. 10 days!?”

She shouted, which caused the damage to rebound to her head. She held her head in pain, and Emina said, “Please rest for a while.”

Cordelia obediently followed her instructions. It felt as if a chime was being struck in her head, and it was impossible for her to do anything else.

“But..... 10 days?”

It's such a waste of time to be sick for that long, she thought.

However, she didn't have time to think about it anymore, and immediately fell asleep while having a nightmare. *I definitely won't catch a cold again,* ——— Cordelia had no choice but to vow that.

She could do absolutely nothing for three days; rather, her condition got worse. However, she was able to get up, a bit, two days after that.

The things in her room multiplied while she was resting; there were flowers, flower vases, and stuffed animals so big that they could even hug her.

The giant stuffed animals were bought by Elvis and Isma. An extremely cool man and a young sparkling man were both carrying those big stuffed animals. She had only been half-conscious at that time, so she couldn't burn the image in her mind. It was really unfortunate that she could only recall it vaguely.

"Ojou-sama, I have brought your meal."

"Thanks, Emina."

"And Vernoux-sama has sent you a letter."

"From Vernoux-sama? Isn't that a box rather than a letter?"

Vernoux's name and the word letter.

Cordelia frowned, because they didn't go together. To be ruder, she even thought, *Vernoux-sama can write a letter?*

She opened it after she'd finished her meal. Inside was an envelope and paper, as well as a small box.

Cordelia picked up the paper first, and there were only three lines written on it.

『How's your cold? I delivered Gille's letter. Get better soon, since I want to eat some sweets.』

She had to postpone her verdict on whether or not Vernoux could write a letter. *I'm sure he didn't have to write this in a hurry, so why is his letter like a memo? But, this does seem like him. And maybe..... He had written this memo because he was so worried,* Cordelia thought. Otherwise, it was impossible for him to pick up his pen.

However, she concluded that the other envelope was a letter from Gille, from reading the memo. The envelope was thin, and she could tell that there were only one or two sheets of paper in there.

『You don't have to read this if you're tired.』

The letter that began with those words was different from the one Vernoux had written; those words indicated Gille's concern for her.

『Did you sleep well?』

『I was going to send you something that was good for colds, but Vernoux stopped me. He said that there's no way you wouldn't have it at the Pameradia House, and that it would become rubbish.』

『I really wanted to come visit you, but it's right before the Founding Festival, and I was told that it was impossible for me to do so.』

She was extremely thankful to the person who stopped Gille as she read that sentence.

Gille had a lot of magic power. She wouldn't be able to look him in the face if she had passed the cold onto him, even if it wasn't before the Founding Festival.

(It's enough for me that you wanted to visit, Gille-sama.)

Even she knew that Gille wasn't one to say flattering words. He had tried to visit her, even though he didn't like to show himself to others. That was enough.

『You really don't need to reply to this letter, so rest well. But let me give you this one gift because I think that you'll get bored when you get a little better. Try listening to it if you want.』

She looked at the little box, that Gille had gifted her, after she'd read the last bit of the letter.

He wrote try listening to it, but what does he mean? She thought, as she took it out.

“It's a music box.”

On the box, that was just big enough to fit on her hand, there was a carving of a rose. As she lightly turned the winding key, and opened the box, she heard a calm and affectionate sound coming from within. And inside it, there was a single, round crystal ball, that served as a charm, and it, too, was wrapped in a red cloth with the charm pattern embroidered on it. She could tell that the embroidery was sewn with great care, however the stitches were actually a little misaligned, asserting itself to be the hard work of an amateur.

(..... Don't tell me Gille-sama did this?)

This clearly wasn't bought. But, she had never heard of a noble male doing needlework before.

(If the person who had embroidered this was really Gille-sama..... Then he must have been really worried about me.)

She had seen Elvis and Isma, so she knew how worried they were.

She had even heard from Emina that Ronnie had been strangely responsible, and he hesitated to enter her room, even though he was worried. “To enter Ojou-sama's room while she is resting is.....” He had said.

Emina also said that Lara, who should have also been isolated, since she held a large amount of magic power, had also caught a cold before, and she was restless with worry.

But as for Gille, she could tell that he was worried from his letter, but she honestly couldn't imagine what his reaction was. Yet, she could imagine what reaction Vernoux had.

A smile naturally appeared on her face, and she picked up the bell on the side table. The bell jingled quietly and Emina immediately appeared.

“Emina, I have a request. Could you get me some paper and a pen?”

“Ojou-sama, are you okay?”

“Yes, I'll be writing it here so it'll be fine.”

She would make Emina worry more if her letters were shaking. So, she was going to stop writing if all her handwriting would cause Emina to worry.

(But, I have to write if I can. Gille-sama said I didn't have to reply to him, but I want to reassure him.)

Of course, she wanted to reassure Vernoux as well. They couldn't see each other and couldn't even communicate properly, so he might keep worrying about her. Therefore, she wanted to tell him that she was fine.

“..... But they might get angry at me if I write a lot.”

I have to make it brief. That is the most important thing. Now then, how do I thank someone in a short sentence? She wondered.

8 days after she'd caught a cold.

Cordelia wasn't energetic enough to walk around the room yet, but she had recovered enough to get up and walk to the sofa by herself. The letter that she had written on the fifth day was delivered to Gille and Vernoux on the sixth day, and she'd received a reply from them both the next day that said, 『You have to sleep, go rest』. The two worried too much, even though she had said she was fine. But she was reluctant to write letters, since they had gone that far to remind her of that.

“So I can't write them a reply until I'm actually well?”

I can't tell how well I have to be so that I can declare that. Of course, if the doctor says I'm fine, then it should be fine..... Cordelia thought that as she softly slipped out of bed.

It was still a bit tiring for her to be up for a long time, but her body ached if she slept for too long. *I want to think that they'll forgive me for moving a little*, she thought as she moved to the sofa.

(But Otou-sama and Onii-sama will probably get angry if they find out that I got up.)

But, she also felt bored from just sitting on the sofa.

Cordelia looked around the room and saw the sewing box on the edge of the table. She pulled the box towards her without hesitating and opened the lid; then she picked up some yarn that had been placed inside.

(I wonder if there aren't any good designs. If possible, I'd like to make something like a charm.....)

She had been delayed because of her cold, but she had originally wanted to give Gille a more precise embroidery. Therefore, as an apology for making him worry about her, she wanted to make him something more appropriate.

(Vernoux-sama might laugh at this..... But I think Gille-sama would be happy with anything, since he likes that poorly crafted handkerchief.)

If she wanted to give presents as an apology, then Gille wasn't the only person she had to give one to. Vernoux had also worried about her. It was impossible for her to only give one of them a present, when both of them had worried about her.

“No..... It's not enough to just give it to the two of them, in the first place. That's right, I have to give something to Otou-sama and Onii-sama too. Ah, but then I'll also have to give one to Emina and Ronnie, and then Lara too.....”

She began to think that, and then wondered how many pieces she needed. Her face twitched. She was aware that she wasn't that good at embroidery, that she could embroider that many gifts.

"I, I'm sure Ronnie would be fine with just food. Yeah, I'm certain. Of course, Vernoux-sama is the same, but I didn't want to leave him out when I think about Gille-sama..... But then, I wonder if it's better to give Ronnie the same thing.....?"

Of course, there wasn't anyone there to answer Cordelia's question. She questioned herself and gave a long sigh.

"I need a minimum of seven. I can do this. Let's think carefully about the designs and colours."

However, if she were to embroider seven designs, then she didn't think she could send a letter stating 『I have gotten better』 .

(I can make Gille-sama and Vernoux-sama's first, but that's also a little...)

At least, she was also worried that it would become a spoiler, since she would probably be giving Vernoux's present to him under the watchful eye of one of the servants. In the first place, it would be embarrassing if they thought she was giving him special treatment, because she had prioritised his present.

"Ye-yeah. And, I could go to the handicraft store when I get well enough to walk around town. I don't have as much yarn as Hazel-sama, so it's not a bad idea to go see them myself. Besides, I can find out what Gille-sama likes from Vernoux-sama..... Ah, of course, I plan to ask Vernoux-sama what he likes as well....."

Cordelia muttered as she gradually spoke faster, and the last bit sounded as if she had choked on her words. She coughed violently, and Emina immediately came into the room.

"Ojou-sama, you still have to rest."

"I, I'm sorry, Emina."

She apologised in between her coughs, which still hadn't stopped, while being guided back to her bed by Emina. And, upon returning, Emina took the embroidery thread that she was still holding onto.

"I will tidy this up."

"Th-thanks....."

She actually wanted to gaze upon the colour to ponder some more, but she wasn't able to, because Emina couldn't let a coughing person stay up. Cordelia understood that and didn't complain.

"Ojou-sama, the most important thing for a sick person is the recovery period."

"Yes, I was planning to understand that."

But she slept so much that she wasn't even tired anymore, so she wanted to get up for a little. She really wanted to write a letter stating that she was well. In fact, she was mostly fine now.

But in contrast to her thoughts, Emina had a really cold expression on her face.

“Everyone will get worried, this time, if your cold were to recur.”

“..... You’re right, I’m sorry.”

Emina made a lot of sense, and Cordelia apologised meekly.

“If you really want to embroider, then I will teach you when you get better.”

I’m extremely happy at the offer, but I also want to give Emina something, so it might be tricky..... She thought that as her drowsiness strangely got stronger.

(Everyone in this house might be spoiling me, after all.)

She thought, as she was invited into dreamland.

Epilogue: The Strength the Prince Wishes For

“Say Gille. Today you’re..... in such a good mood that it’s eerie.”

I couldn’t help but tilt my head at Vernoux, who said that so abruptly.

“It’s so rude of you to say that it’s eerie. Do I look that happy to you?”

“Yeah. You should learn self-control if you don’t realise it yourself. There’s nothing good about a future king who lets his feelings show on his face. Fix that right now.”

I looked at Vernoux, who had said that firmly, and sighed on purpose. Sure, I was in a good mood, but I wasn’t planning on advertising it so someone could point it out.

So, it was a little surprising; especially the eerie part.

“You don’t have to worry about it, you know I have always acted properly until now, don’t you, Vernoux?”

“Until now, that is. When I look at you now, I can’t help but worry about when your mask will fall off.”

“It’s rude to say it’s a mask. But, I can’t help but act this way now, can I? You’re the only person here after all.”

It was tiring to be tense when I don’t have to be. And what Vernoux had just said didn’t just apply to me. Vernoux was talking to 『Gille』 not 『Sylvester』, so we were completely in private mode. I guess we’re even.

“Well, don’t overdo it.”

Vernoux, who received my gaze, said, and then shrugged his shoulders. It seemed that he understood that.

It might have been too late to say it, but the reason why I’m in such a good mood is that I was finally able to meet Dilly, after four years. And I even got to meet her twice.

I couldn’t help but be happy.

Our letter exchange continued without pause, but I never had the chance to see how much she had changed. *It’s great that I don’t have to..... be jealous of Vernoux for a while.* I think it was a coincidence, but Vernoux probably didn’t have the golden lion embroidery that matched my eyes. Speaking of Vernoux, he would probably say something like, “It’s not like I’m jealous of you.”

And now, I was writing letters addressed to Dilly as 『Gille』. I felt like I could write a lot more in them than I did before.

“..... You’re really fuel-efficient.”

I couldn’t tell if he was shocked or amazed. But, it couldn’t mean anything good, since Vernoux was the one who was saying it.

..... I admit that I was too happy, but what is this next part? I don’t even know why he brought up fuel in the first place. Vernoux, who was receiving my stare, grinned unpleasantly.

“Even if you say that you met her, you couldn’t even tell her that you’re 『Sylvester』 , and she runs away straight away if you try to talk to her as 『Sylvester』 . You spoke to her at the Hale mansion as 『Gille』 . Even so, you’re happy about that, and that’s why you’re fuel-efficient.”

“.....”

I still don’t know why she’s avoiding me, I looked at Vernoux, who was speaking and thought that.

Vernoux certainly had the power to change a flower garden into a snowy field.

“..... My bad. Don’t glare at me.”

“I’m not.”

“But, I did make a chance for you to meet Dilly, you know?”

“And I’m thankful for that.”

I wouldn’t have been able to meet Dilly, or exchange letters with her, without Vernoux’s help.

(..... She still avoids me, even after four years, huh.)

To be honest, I would like to know why she was avoiding me. As long as I know that, then I might be able to dispel my fear.

“Speaking of which, I recently heard this from the magician at Dilly’s house.”

“Mm?”

“Dilly said she liked knights before, right? Apparently that’s because she was using Earl Pameradia as reference.”

I thought he had seen right through me, and was going to give me some advice, but he uttered something unexpected.

“Hah?”

“Well, the usual magician told me, 『When Ojou-sama was younger, she told Master “I will marry Otou-sama!”』 .”

“..... Why did your conversation turn that way?”

“Well, I wasn’t going to ask about Dilly’s taste in men or anything. The conversation just ended up that way.”

Vernoux often talked about the 『Funny and Odd Magician』 . He was probably talking about that magician, this time as well. I don’t know much about him, since the only contact I’ve had with him, was when I saw him for a moment, when I first met Dilly. But, I somehow get that this magician knows Dilly well, from the way Vernoux acts.

“Gille?”

“Nothing. I was just thinking that it’s surprising. So, she also says things like that.”

“Well, it doesn’t seem to be her pattern.”

“I didn’t say that. Isn’t it cute? It’s just that I thought that Dilly is mature, so I’m a little surprised.”

When, and in what situation, did she say it? Even though I thought that, I was a little puzzled by the seriousness of those words.

“The Earl, huh.....”

I knew that Dilly seems to be attracted to knights. I can’t become a knight, but I intend to do my best to be like a knight, even if just by a little.

But, I never imagined that the knight that Dilly was speaking of was the Earl.

“.....”

Earl Pameradia, the person who she might have based her ideals of a knight on. I have seen him around the castle before, but I’ve never had a deep conversation with him. However, I have heard of his past achievements and a lot of rumours about him.

(If I get to know the Earl, then I might be able to understand a little about what Dilly thinks about.)

But, how do create the opportunity to interact with him? It might be a bit easier for me to create the opportunity if I was an adult. I couldn’t help but resent the fact that I was still a child.

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It seemed that I was very lucky. The situation that I thought was helpless, wasn’t blocked on all sides.

“Sylvester. It’s nearly your birthday, isn’t it?”

“Yes, father.”

It happened when I passed by my father in the corridor.

My father was particularly busy lately, and he didn’t talk to me much. However, I was honestly happy that he had remembered my birthday.

“Is there anything you want? Don’t be afraid to tell me.”

Father said that to me every year, on my birthday. However, up until now, I had only one thing to say to his kind words.

Which were 『Anything father gives me would make me happy』 .

Of course, it wasn’t like I didn’t want anything, but I was satisfied with the usual things. There are times when I wanted something new, but I was satisfied with buying it with the money I received, so I couldn’t come up with anything I particularly needed.

I was going to give him the same answer this year..... when I suddenly noticed.

“.....”

I was a little worried about whether I could say it.

But, father noticed the change in my attitude.

“What’s wrong, Sylvester?”

“Well..... Erm.....”

“It’s rare for you to stammer. If you have something you want, then just tell me. I can’t give you an answer if you don’t tell me.”

“..... Father. Is it fine if it’s not an object?”

I received his words, and asked a little haltingly.

“Are you planning to say something interesting?”

“I..... want to have a match with Earl Pameradia.”

“With Elvis, is it?”

Father opened his eyes wide with surprise, because he hadn’t expected that request.

“Elvis is certainly a peerless master swordsman. But you have a teacher, don’t you?”

“Of course I respect my teacher. And, it’s not like I’m asking the Earl to teach me. I simply want to exchange swords with him.”

“Why do you want that?”

“The Earl, whose strength I have heard of, I want to experience it.”

Of course, I had the option of asking to talk to the Earl, without wishing to have a match with him.

But, the Earl is Dilly’s ideal knight. I want to experience his figure as he swings his sword up close. Even though he has retired from the knights, he is still known as the best swordsman in this kingdom, and I thought that the quickest way is to see that for myself. It might be a foolish idea, but the Earl is someone whom I am interested in, even if Dilly wasn’t involved, I thought as I looked seriously at father.

Father’s eyes widened at my words and then he laughed.

“Hahaa, I don’t know if you’ll be any match for him. But, it’s interesting. It’ll be good if you’re crushed into little pieces, and have your immaturity engraved into you. I’ll tell the Earl that he doesn’t need to restrain himself. But, don’t get hurt on your own birthday.”

I thought, *you don’t have to tell me*, at my father who was laughing heartily. Of course, I didn’t think I would win, or get away unscathed, but he wouldn’t be punished even if he prayed for a good fight.

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——— Oh my goodness. Earl Pameradia was immediately brought to the castle, the next day, thanks to father's thoughtfulness, and I couldn't help but realise immediately that it was a mistake.

Father told the Earl, with an exaggerated gesture, "Don't hesitate and beat him," and the Earl obeyed his words. As a result, I was literally quite helpless. That day, I couldn't do anything at all, except for moving the Earl's hands. The Earl, who hadn't even moved from his spot since the beginning, bowed at father and left after father said, "Sorry for troubling you, Elvis. I'll count on you again." My breathing had risen completely.

The Earl didn't take a single step during the match. He simply reflected my sword. I was forced to understand, however reluctant, that he seemed to be using my strength to sometimes reflect my sword and sometimes repel it.

I don't know what the Earl was thinking, but I realised that he was proud of his remarkable ability.

"Sylvester. Do you understand Elvis' strength now?"

"Father..... Would you allow me to continue crossing swords with the Earl?"

I conveyed my wish to father who was speaking cheerfully. Father looked as if he had been caught off guard, but then he laughed heartily in the next second.

And, the evening four days after I first asked for a match with Earl Pameradia.

"Can you stand up, Your Highness?"

The Earl was holding a practice sword, and he was looking down at me emotionlessly.

His voice wasn't filled with worry at all. He was just asking me if I could continue or not.

"I'm still okay, so....."

I started to stand up as I said that, but my legs got tangled and I fell down on my butt.

The Earl silently sheathed his sword.

"Let's end here for today. Any more than this and you'll just get hurt."

"....."

"Shall I send you to your room?"

"..... No, it's fine. I'll rest for a bit before going back."

"Then, please excuse me."

The Earl left while saying that. The Earl also didn't move his foot at all today. Of course, I didn't think that my skills would improve dramatically in a few days, so it wasn't strange.

But it's really frustrating. Up until now, there might not have been anyone who has been confronted with such an overwhelming difference.

I thought up until there, and gasped.

“Earl! Thanks for today too.”

I forgot to tell him the important thing.

The Earl turned back at my voice and said, “His Highness instructed me to, so please don’t mind,” before he started walking once again. For some reason, his figure overlapped with Cordelia’s when she met 『Sylvester』, the other day. It seems like it’s easy for people..... in the Pameradia House to run away from me.

“..... It’s still fine, I wanted to say it again.”

You’ll just get hurt.

I couldn’t reply to the Earl when he said that. If only I was stronger..... Even though I thought that, my body couldn’t follow at all.

After my first match with the Earl, my sword teacher had said, 『If you can train your body, then the things you can do will naturally increase』. *I don’t think that he’s wrong. But I get a little frustrated when I think, isn’t there some way I can do a little more, right now?*

I slowly stood up, but I didn’t feel like going back to my room yet, so I sat down on the edge of the flower bed.

I don’t know how much time had passed since then, but it was around the time when the colour in the sky started to change.

“Your Highness? What are you doing here alone?”

I was surprised that someone had spoken to me, but I was even more surprised that the person who had called out to me was the Earl’s son, and he was carrying a package with both hands.

“..... So it’s you, Isma.”

Isma Ismael Pameradia.

Unlike the Earl, he had a gentle smile, and was a kind person; he talked to me occasionally when I’m alone. However, he wasn’t the type of person to suck up to me.

I feel like Isma is talking to me from a guardian’s perspective. I also think that if he thinks about his sister Dilly, then he would be worried about me, since I’m the same age as her.

I thought that and Isma slowly bent down to the same level as me, who was sitting.

“This is the result of me asking for a match with the Earl.”

“Earl.....? Don’t tell me it’s my father?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Apparently Isma didn't know that I had wanted to have a match with the Earl. Now that I think about it, the Earl didn't seem like he was the type of person to tell this to people, one by one.

Isma widened his eyes when he heard that and then smiled wryly.

"My father is strong, isn't he?"

"Yeah. Even though the Earl was only countering my attacks, he still struck in the places where I was careless..... I thought that I might be able to do better before, but I couldn't at all."

"Is that so?"

"..... Why are you smiling?"

Isma is the type of person to always smiles anyway, but this smile is definitely different.

As I thought that, Isma put a hand to his mouth to try suppress his smile and said, "I'm sorry."

"I had the same feelings as Your Highness when I was younger, so I understand it well."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Isma's answer was surprising. Of course, I can image that Isma had a childhood, but Isma was a man who excelled amongst the knights. I couldn't imagine him being in the same situation as me, where he was helpless.

"Do you doubt me?"

"No, I don't....."

"It was when I was a child, so father was younger and his power was still unmatched. And he wasn't as soft as he is now, so I was really depressed on days when I had to practice."

"So even something like that happens to you, Isma?"

"Yes, of course."

"..... Isma. Do you think I could become stronger?"

If he had the same thoughts as me when he was younger, then would I be able to gain the power to compete with that sword on equal footing someday? I thought, while looking straight into Isma's eyes.

I want him to tell me that I could.

I wanted those reassuring words from a person who had experienced that before.

But the words that Isma uttered were different.

"Your Highness, what is the definition of 『strong』 to you? If you can decide that, then it is possible."

"....."

"Does Your Highness wish for strong 『military』 power?"

I, who was asked that question, couldn't answer straight away, and flinched for an instant.

Isma smiled at me.

"Hesitate, Your Highness. And then, materialise your strong self."

Isma said that and I nodded reflectively. Then, I became aware of it.

Ah, so this is the kind of adults around Dilly.

..... Seems like I'm still not a match.

I thought that, and once again resolved myself and nodded strongly.

"Your Highness, it will be dark outside soon. I will send you to your room."

"Ah. But, aren't you still in the middle of something?"

He's probably still in the middle of an errand, since he's holding a package. I didn't mind returning to somewhere like my room by myself, I thought and Isma looked at the package in my sight and briefly denied, "No."

"This package was sent by my little sister."

"Package? From Cordelia-sama?"

"Yes. You know my sister, don't you Your Highness."

"Yeah. I met her at the Flantheim House. I also hear a lot about her from Vernoux."

He desperately swallowed the words that he was going to say on reflex; "From Dilly?"

It wasn't a surprise for Sylvester to know Cordelia, but he had no reason to call her intimately by the name Dilly.

If I could call her that, then I would be able to hear more about her. I got disappointed when I thought that, but I definitely won't say it.

"This is the materials for the compress that I received from my sister. You use it by mixing it with water and adding a towel."

"A compress, is it?"

"I won't give this to you, you know?"

He said a bit playfully, but maybe he didn't know that those words disheartened me more than he could imagine. I knew that it was a selfish complaint, but forgive me, just for today, for being a little jealous of him.

I slowly stood up and returned to my room with Isma.

"It's nearly time for the Founding Festival, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

I replied to Isma, who was looking at the people, who were carrying cloth decorations, as he said that, and once again thought, *it's already time for the Founding Festival this year.*

It was the biggest festival in the kingdom.

And, I took the opportunity to ask Isma a single question.

“Will Cordelia-sama be coming to the castle?”

A part of the castle would be opened to the general public, so people who didn't usually come here would be able to come. But then again, in Dilly's case, she gets invited to visit, but she doesn't.....

No, it isn't necessarily true that Dilly refused, just because the Earl did, so the Founding Festival might be a different story.

However, Isma, who was tilting his head, answered easily.

“No, she won't be. Neither my father, brother, nor I could take her here around that time.”

“I see.”

I didn't ask any more than that, as not to sound strangely suspicious. Of course, I was disheartened.

“I hope that the festival will be good this year too.”

“Yeah.”

It would be good if everyone could enjoy the festival.

That's what I also wish for. I might not be able to meet Dilly, but I hope that I can do my duty well, and after the Founding Festival is over, I'll go to meet her as 『Gille』.

Because I probably won't be able to make Dilly pay attention to me if I'm someone who can't fulfil his own duty.

Act 21: Pameradia House's Eldest Brother

Time was slowly ticking away in the Pameradia greenhouse, as it received warm sunlight today also.

Cordelia was enjoying her time, while drinking tea, but, as if cutting through her mood, the sounds of footsteps, the door opening, and a cheerful voice following it, echoed in the room.

“Ojou-sama, look at this writing tool! I think it’s become a wonderful writing tool!!”

The voice belonged to a small servant of the Pameradia House, Lara. Lara, who had entered the greenhouse while grandly hoisting the pencil, that Cordelia had entrusted her to produce, walked up to Cordelia and presented her with a piece of paper.

On the paper were words written by that pencil.

“Oh my, it’s true. The letters look very clear now.”

Lara, who saw that Cordelia was surprised when she had received the paper, put her hands on her waist and posed in a triumph way.

But, that was why Cordelia couldn’t help but say, “..... But, your test-writing has some mistakes in it.”

“I’d be happy if you pretend that you didn’t see that.”

“Unfortunately, I want to see it written neat and clear. Also, don’t forget to open the door quietly.”

Lara, who had already finished Aisha’s lady training, hadn’t behaved like that for a long time, so Cordelia could guess that she was that happy. Cordelia was also happy, and she thought that Lara’s behaviour was cute. But..... it was also bad to let the other servants see her act like that.

“See, Lara. That’s why I told you to calm down, didn’t I?”

The next person to slowly appear was the analysis magician of the Pameradia House, and Cordelia’s assistant, Ronnie Eris. He was a talented person who had gotten excellent results at the Royal Magic Academy, but he was also a frivolous person, who acted as he please, which caused his colleagues to give him candid advice. But, Cordelia welcomed his easy-going personality, so it wasn’t a problem at all.

However, whenever Lara didn’t behave very well, she would say, 『It’s Ronnie’s fault for teaching me like that! 』, so she often thought, *shouldn’t Ronnie behave reliably to a certain degree?* But, she also thought that it wouldn’t be like him.

“Ojou-sama, what’s wrong? You’re frowning; it would be bad if the wrinkles stay that way.”

“..... Right. Just because I thought it, doesn’t mean it’ll work out somehow.”

“It’s nothing.”

Cordelia replied curtly to Ronnie, who was looking at her curiously, and once again dropped her eyes onto the piece of paper that she’d received from Lara.

“If good writing tools can be made like this, then I want some cheaper paper next time.”

Once these writing tools were completed, they would be distributed to school children in Pameradia fief, including Caina Village. It would be necessary to develop bread to be used as erasers, but pencils were easier than pens to use as a writing tool.

However, she also wanted to prepare paper next time, if they could erase things and the amount of writing they did increased.

“Ronnie, could I ask you to procure paper at the Eris Firm?”

I can consult these things with him because he's the third son of an extremely wealthy merchant house, right? Cordelia thought, but Lara was the one who voiced her question.

“Say, Ronnie. Eris Firm is that big shop, right?”

“Oh? Have you never heard Ronnie's full name before, Lara?”

It occurred to Cordelia, as she looked at Lara, that they hadn't had the chance to tell each other their full names. It was probably because Lara had only stated her name, so Ronnie followed suit. It seemed that they'd lost the chance to tell each other their full names, since they already knew each other's first names.

In fact, if Lara asked him, then Ronnie wouldn't hide it.

“..... Well, it's huge.”

Nevertheless, it seemed he had a hard time answering, and he looked as if he was hesitating.

But, Lara didn't seem to care about how he was acting.

“Ronnie is a young master?!”

Cordelia couldn't help but laugh at how honestly surprised Lara was. Lara had her eyes wide in surprise, but Ronnie was the same.

“Young master. Young master, huh. Young master.”

It was an extremely cute word to describe the adult Ronnie, and Cordelia couldn't help but mutter it back.

“O-ojou-sama, please don't laugh..... Your shoulders are shaking.”

“Because, you know..... But, yes, Ronnie is a young master.”

“Ah, I told you to stop already!”

Cordelia teased him, and Ronnie turned red and countered back. It was a rare look on Ronnie. He became sulkier as Cordelia couldn't stop her giggling. Lara stared at them and came to some kind of understanding.

“I see. So that's why Ronnie drinks tea so elegantly.”

“You think so?”

“He always slacks off so much, but when he holds a cup..... I wonder if it’s the way he uses his fingers. It’s very courteous. I think his fingertips are different than normal.”

Lara said that, and Cordelia was a little surprised.

“You pay a lot of attention to him.”

“N..... No! I was watching him!”

“Mm?”

What’s the difference?

She wondered, but if she thought about it, the topic had already strayed quite a bit.

First, let’s go back to talking about the paper, Cordelia changed what she was thinking.

The price of paper used on a daily basis in the kingdom wasn’t terribly high, but it was still expensive. There were a lot of cases where people couldn’t remember things if they didn’t write them down, so it was probably beneficial for them to get a bundle of cheap paper for learning. It also wasn’t bad for them to pack all their words together on each piece of paper, but it would be inconvenient when they review it.

“Ronnie, we’re going to talk about the paper again, but is it possible for us to procure cheap paper from the firm, even if the quality drops slightly?”

“Well..... I don’t think it’s impossible. The firm doesn’t stock things that are not of good quality, because that is their policy, but they use it in the store. Shall I arrange for a sample to be sent over?”

“Thanks.”

“I should be thanking you too. My family has been telling me to do sales promotions. But..... Well, it might be good to get competitive quotes. I know other paper manufacturers and wholesalers. If that way is cheaper, then it’ll be better for your finances, right?”

“Thanks. You really lack business skills, don’t you Ronnie?”

Cordelia said jokingly, and Ronnie looked irritated.

“Aaaaaaah! Of course, you can’t tell my family! I’ve been told that I have no talent for business, even at the best of times!”

“Fufu, of course I won’t say anything. It would be terrible if you said that your job is bad and quit.”

“Oh, that wouldn’t happen even if you told on me. It’s easy to work here and I can’t afford to pay the Magic Academy tuition by myself. The tea is also delicious.”

“..... Oh my, is that so?”

Even so, wouldn’t it be more convenient for him if I don’t say anything? she thought and smiled wryly.

After that, they continued to chatter, and Ronnie opened his mouth as if he remembered something.

“Ah, come to think of it, there’s a rumour going around the mansion.”

“What is it about?”

“They said that Cyrus-sama is finally going to marry. Well, even if they say that, he’s been engaged for a long time, so it should be about time for him to get married..... Mm..... If I remember correctly, he’s engaged to the lady of the Alcott House..... Right?”

Lara glanced at Ronnie, who was hazily trying to recall information, and cleared her throat once.

Then, she spoke when their attention was on her.

“Christina Alcott-sama. Her father is Earl Alcott, who focuses on silk manufacturing. They produced half the dress fabrics presented to the Royal family and they live in Flora.”

“..... Lara. How do you know such detailed information?”

“It’s important information for someone who serves noble ladies, right? Aisha-sensei told me that it’s better for me to know these things.”

Ronnie was surprised, and Cordelia curtly stated, “Correct,” at Lara, who looked as if she was having too much fun.

“So, that Christina-sama will become your Onee-sama, right Ojou-sama? I hope she’s a good person.”

“Of course, I’ve met her before. She’s extremely beautiful and quiet.”

Christina Alcott. A gentle woman with gentle white-beige hair and dark green eyes.

And, the Pameradia House’s eldest son, who is going to marry her, Cyrus Pameradia, resembled their father so much that people around them thought, 『I’m sure Elvis-sama looked like this when he was younger』. He was also the deputy commander of the 1st Imperial Guards Unit, and he has won martial arts competitions many times. He also seemed to be good at studying, from what she could tell from the books he ordered for the library.

She had heard that Cyrus and Christina got engaged when he was seven and she was three. The painting of the two when they were together looked as if they were angels. And, the appearance of the two together now gave off an ambience like a story. Both of them were quiet, so they looked as if they were real paintings.

That was how quiet the both of them were. Yes, extremely.

(They’re really both too quiet.)

If the mood isn’t bad, whether their lively or quiet, then it’s fine, Cordelia thought. However, she was worried when she thought that Christina might be a docile lady.

The Pameradia House was a little dangerous. It was a house where spies and assassin-like people get sent to, even though it was rare. She was worried that a docile lady would faint if she heard about that. Cordelia wasn’t suggesting that Christina was faint-hearted, but it wasn’t something that happened in other Houses.

(..... No, perhaps the me who isn't scared of this is also a part of me. I wonder if I've become numb to it.)

Cordelia wanted to ask Ronnie about how many incidents had occurred in the past year, but she decided not to because Lara was there. She didn't want Lara to be worried by strange things. And, the number of attacks could probably be counted on one hand, and even in the worst case, two hands were enough.

(But, it's difficult to image that Earl Alcott didn't come up with any countermeasures after he decided his daughter's engagement at three.)

She didn't know which side suggested the engagement, but he probably predicted that someone without courage could not become a wife of the Pameradia House. Her mother, who had abandoned everything, was probably an exception, but status, history, wealth and fame..... The jealousy one received from those, increased the higher the position got. Therefore, a certain amount of courage was needed for one not to be crushed..... Or so it seemed.

"If so, then the problem would be..... Yes, that's right."

"..... Ojou-sama, what's wrong?"

"Onii-sama is a man of few words, so I wondered how he conversed with Christina-sama."

I don't think that they would have a cold relationship, like our parents do, but do they get along well?
Cordelia felt a little bit uneasy about that.

(I don't think they have a bad relationship, but I wonder..... How is it for people who have their engagements decided at a young age?)

I've never been in that position, so I don't know. If I was obliged to accept it then..... Cordelia thought, and her expression became grim.

"Ahaha. They talk like normal, don't they?"

Ronnie laughed loudly at Cordelia's concern, but then he gradually tilted his head in puzzlement.

"I have a feeling I've never heard more than ten words from Cyrus-sama."

"No, I don't think that's possible..... It's a mystery."

I wish that Cyrus-oniisama talks more in front of Christina-sama..... Cordelia thought, and she heard the sound of the greenhouse door opening. She slowly looked in that direction and saw Cyrus, whom they were just talking about.

"Cordelia, are you free?"

"C-cyrus-oniisama!!"

"Sorry, did I surprise you?"

Cyrus, who looked like Elvis, also had the same expressions as him..... In other words, he was expressionless. Cordelia quickly shook her head, "No," at Cyrus, whose voice even resembled Elvis's.



“What seems to be the matter?”

“Christina is coming to the Royal Capital for the Founding Festival.”

“Oh my, it has been a long time.”

The Founding Festival.

This festival celebrated the day the founding king of Crista Kingdom got crowned. The festival started with a parade seven days earlier, a celebration ceremony which had been continually performed since ancient times, and the opening of part of the castle. Each day was also packed with many events, such as demonstrations by knights and martial arts tournaments open to the public. A lot of tourists came to the Royal Capital at that time of the year to participate in such big events. Thereupon, with that, a lot of peddlers also gathered at the Royal Capital, and a part of the plaza became a market, which normally couldn't be seen there..... or so she had heard.

However, Cordelia had never been able to see the festival.

That wasn't because she didn't want to. Instead, she did. However, people gathering here meant that her father, Elvis, and her two knight brothers had more work to do. Even if someone were to accompany her, they would probably worry about a child being in a crowd of people.

(It pains me to trouble Otou-sama when he probably thinks about my welfare a lot.)

Otou-sama might make arrangements if I say that I want to go. But I feel bad if I say something unreasonable during a period when he's probably tired. And even if I don't go now, I should be able to go once I grow up..... When she thought that, she couldn't help but endure.

So, even though she was jealous that Christina was participating in the festival, she wondered why he came here to tell her that and waited for him to keep talking.

“She will stay at the Royal Capital for a while, even after the Founding Festival has ended.”

“Okay.”

“She said that she wanted to see the Royal Capital after the Founding Festival. Her maid isn't familiar with the Royal Capital. Do you mind lending her Emina?”

I see, if that's the case then there was no one more suitable for the job than Emina, she thought. Emina, the maid in charge of Cordelia, was used to the Royal Capital and she used to be a noble, so she also knew a lot about noble aesthetics. It would also be reassuring for Christina since she would probably be anxious to be in an unfamiliar place.

“I don't mind. I will tell Emina.”

Cordelia would also be delighted if being guided around the Royal Capital by Emina, would ease any anxiety Christina had about living in the Royal Capital in the future.

But, in contrast to Cordelia who had replied with a smile on her face, Cyrus was silent, and he stared at her expressionlessly.

“.....”

“Onii-sama? Is something wrong?”

Did he want to talk to me about something else? She tilted her head in wonder, and Cyrus spoke after a moment of silence.

“You talk to her as well.”

He spoke again, and Cordelia was a little surprised.

There is a ten-year difference between us, so we both act a bit reserved to the other; but we did talk to each other if we have time when we meet. Although, Christina does come here to meet Cyrus-oniisama, so we couldn't talk for a long time..... She thought up until there, and then suddenly realised a reason for it.

“Onii-sama has to work..... Isn't that right?”

“Yeah.”

Yes, their appointment was different from usual, and was at the end of the Founding Festival. Cyrus's work didn't finish when the festival ended, and his various routine duties probably accumulated. It was hardly surprising considering his position.

“Okay, Onii-sama.”

Cyrus nodded at Cordelia's reply.

But while replying, her thoughts were mixed.

(But..... It's a shame since they finally got a chance to meet.)

She did think that it couldn't be helped, and she knew that there was nothing she could do about it. Cyrus also didn't seem like he was disappointed. But, that also made her anxious.

(No, Onii-sama always shows no expression. And, conversely, I should think of this as a chance. I will also be living with Christina-sama for several years. This is a great opportunity to get along with her.)

Cordelia rethought positively. *If so, then I want to spend a lot of time with her.* Then, she came up with a plan.

“Onii-sama. Would I be able to join Christina-sama on her tour of the Royal Capital?”

“.....”

“If it's possible, then I can talk to her a lot.”

Cyrus remained silent at Cordelia's proposal. He seemed to be thinking about something, but she couldn't tell, since his expression didn't change. After a little while, he spoke, while remaining expressionless.

“I don't mind, if you're not too tomboyish. You also need to get permission from father and Christina.”

“Okay.”

What conduct is he referring to when he said too tomboyish.....? Even though she thought that, she still replied firmly.

She could come up with a few conducts that Cyrus's words were referring to, but she hadn't intended for him to know about them..... As expected from the next head of house.

Cordelia broke out in cold sweat, but the conversation had already ended for him.

"..... Have you ever heard of the name Clive Leif Eames?"

"Huh? Yes, if it's the name..... He's Marquis Eames's son, is he not?"

She was surprised by the sudden name and quickly dragged out the information from her mind.

"I have never spoken to him before, but I have heard rumours that he has returned from his study abroad."

But, just because she knew the name didn't mean that Clive was someone she knew. They were different in age, and she didn't know what he looked like, at all.

However, in contrast to Cordelia's curiosity, Cyrus looked like he understood something.

"Onii-sama?"

"No, I was asked what kind of person you were at the castle the other day."

"Why did he ask about me?"

"I don't know, that's why I asked you. But, it might be linked to research if you've never talked to him before."

"..... Research?"

Is that a word used for humans? Cordelia doubted, so she repeated the word and Cyrus nodded.

"The son of Marquis Eames is the same as the son of Marquis Flantheim; they both stay by the side of the Crown Prince. But then, this is a recent thing..... Since he returned from abroad. He's a bit older, so it seems like he'll be used as an overseer."

"What does that have to do with me?"

"He might have wanted to ascertain His Highness's queen candidates."

Cyrus spoke lightly, and Cordelia nearly tensed her face. In a contrasting mood, Lara secretly raised her voice in surprise, "Wow."

"I, impossible."

"I wouldn't say that if you think about your lineage and age."

"But..... That's right, His Highness is close to that Vernoux-sama. When it comes to love, he might be free to choose who he loves, just like the Flantheim House. If he makes up his mind, then he might even welcome someone from town."

She said that while equipping her sense, in response to Cyrus. She desperately pulled out materials for refuting, but her own claim shouldn't be too bizarre. However, one could even say it was only wishful thinking, since she had never interacted with that person before.....

(But, at least in the game, the Prince didn't place value on social status.)

Leaving aside whether he was influenced from Vernoux or not, it was certain from the knowledge Cordelia had of him. The Heroine was the daughter of an Earl, but their first contact was when she lived in town. Even in the story, there were reminiscence cuts set out in small pieces, and she remembered that they displayed an event at the end where the Prince fell in love with her, while she was living in town.

(Before the Heroine was taken in by the Earl, from her appearance, she was around ten..... Right? Her age wasn't stated, but she was probably around that age.)

Then, it wouldn't be strange if the Prince and Heroine have already interacted. If they had, then I sincerely hope that the Prince will nurture that important memory and deepen his relationship with the Heroine. If they haven't, then I want them to meet as soon as possible. I will not interfere with their fates at all. So, please.

(This isn't the time to be thinking that!)

She looked at Cyrus as she returned her thoughts, which had strayed, to the topic at hand. She concentrated on her eyes and appealed that she didn't intend to marry the Prince, but Cyrus didn't seem to be reacting to her expression.

“The standard demanded of the Queen doesn't change, no matter what His Highness thinks. If one is to become Queen, they are required to have all kinds of education, including etiquette, foreign languages, politics and law. Knowledge and conduct can become one's sword or armour, but if you don't have those, then your position could be shaken. If they influence diplomacy, then it would affect this kingdom's future.”

“.....”

“The son of the Eames' House is probably looking for a lady close to His Highness' age because he knows this.”

(..... He has a point.)

She couldn't particularly refute any of his words. If she was forced to say it, then she would claim, 『If His Highness chooses them, then they would work hard! 』, however there was no way for her to recommend a partner that doesn't exist at this time.

(To begin with, in the game, the 『Cordelia』 was offended by the Heroine's rude behaviour when they bumped into each other..... There's no use sticking up for her now, I guess?)

However, it shouldn't be a problem because the Heroine should be working hard to improve herself. For example, she would smile even if Cordelia were to pour a drink on her at an evening party.

On the other hand, she did feel some sympathy for the Heroine. She stepped into the noble world at a late age, and thus she had had to learn everything at once. In addition, the Queen candidate's education couldn't be compared to that of a normal noble lady's.

(Any noble lady has a certain degree of education; the question is just how many noble ladies thoroughly worked their way up their career.)

They are expected to grow, but they didn't want more than they had in the first place.

"Even if Earl Eames's son didn't go around asking about candidates, His Highness cannot decide his own marriage partner. One could even say that he has a cautious personality."

"..... You're right."

(But if that's the case, then I want to quickly be considered as an unsuitable candidate.)

However, even if I wish it so, it is rather hard to conclude if I am. It might be possible if I act dim-witted in front of Earl Eames's son, but then it would be my loss if the people around us thought of me as a fool. I don't want to behave in a way that would make my reputation bad. If I think like that, then the ideal evaluation would be 『neither good nor bad』.

Cordelia felt silent as she pondered, and Cyrus continued, "Well,"

"In any case, I don't feel any merit in having the current you marry into the Royal Palace. To begin with, you're in an easy position to catch his attention, but you yourself do not wish to approach him. I don't think that His Highness, who is surrounded by so many people, would especially be interested in you."

"Ara, even if I love His Highness, there are many other lovely ladies around."

She strongly agreed with his words in her mind, *that's right!!* As she smiled and replied. Then, he continued, "There wouldn't be any fatal disadvantages even if you marry him." Those words went into one ear and out the other.

(It's fantastic that Onii-sama, the next head of house, doesn't care about it.)

That thought was very important to Cordelia right now.

But, even though the conversation has ended, Onii-sama still seems like he's thinking about something. I couldn't tell since his expression didn't change, but I have a feeling that it's the same as how Otou-sama acted before he said something.

Cordelia thought that, and Cyrus began, "Also,"

"I know it's a bit late to ask..... But, I heard that you declared something interesting when you were younger. Do you still want to marry father?"

"..... Huh? Yes. If there is a man like Otou-sama, then I would like to marry him."

Cordelia felt disappointed at Cyrus's sudden question and was somewhat bewildered. And if possible, she didn't want him to ask that here. By no means was she regretting that remark, in fact, she would even advocate it.

But..... she had a feeling that she could feel a tepid gaze on her back. If possible, she wanted to avoid being asked that in front of Ronnie and Lara.

Cyrus paid no heed to Cordelia and continued his questioning.

“Then, do you want to choose your own husband?”

“Huh?”

“I just want to hear the general opinion.”

“I think it’s hard for me to talk about the general opinion on this..... No matter what, I think that I would be happy if I could meet someone wonderful.”

She did yearn for love, but the problem right now was the start, 『How to make an encounter』. Thus, she still couldn’t imagine herself finding love and getting married. Therefore, she couldn’t help but give a safe answer, even if they were her true feelings, Cyrus looked as if he was thinking.

“Onii-sama, why do you want to know that?”

She had never heard him talk about that before. No, she had never even talked about that with her brother Isma, who she talked with more. Cyrus responded to Cordelia’s question without hesitation.

“I was wondering what Christina was thinking. She became engaged to me at the age when you said that to father.”

“Ah.....”

“I’m going to the castle. I’ve taken up your time.”

“Ah, yes.....”

Today was probably his day off, since he was at the mansion at that time. But he still had work to do because it was a busy time.

(..... Christina-sama isn’t the only person whose feelings I don’t know; I don’t know how Onii-sama feels either. But, I have a feeling I understand his feelings a little, from how worried he is about Christina-sama, even though he’s busy.)

If not, then he could have sent a letter to ask about the matter concerning Emina, and he wouldn’t have taken the time to go home at all.

“..... Would they also let me get a little excited?”

Cordelia still had no idea what she could do. Even so, she wanted to be a mediator for Cyrus and Christina.

Intermission 01: One Day in a Section of the Royal Castle

“Beautiful white clouds are swimming in the blue sky, aren’t there? Don’t you think it’s boring to be studying at a desk on such a beautiful day? Personally, I think it would be more meaningful to do sword training.”

In the quiet room, the person who had said that was Vernoux.

Vernoux had been reading a textbook in the corner of the room before, but he had thrown it onto the desk now. And, that book was fanned by the wind that blew in from the window and the pages were flipping on their own. The pages became stationary when the wind stopped, but I don’t think that was the page that Vernoux needed.

I also wanted to agree with Vernoux’s opinion.

When the weather was this nice, I wanted to be grateful for the peaceful day with a cup of tea in the garden. I don’t even mind sword training. But, I was hesitant to say those words.

If I was alone with Vernoux, then I am sure I would agree. But we weren’t alone. There was another person in this room apart from Vernoux and I.

He was disgusted and advised Vernoux in a voice that sounded as it was crawling on the ground.

“..... Vernoux-dono, do you still not understand? This is not study; it is a substitute for you taking His Highness out of the castle.”

His name is Clive Leif Eames.

He is Marquis Eames’s son and a young man who had studied abroad, until a few days ago. And, after he had returned home, the situation was that he was now working by my side. I have no recollection of seeing his face before he went to study, but now I see it every day.

“Honestly, you can’t even settle this matter without someone watching over you?”

Clive complained with a sour look on his face, but unfortunately, his expression had no effect on Vernoux at all. Vernoux sat shallowly on the sofa and stretched his legs out in a bad manner, as he refuted.



“I didn’t really take him out. His Highness wanted to ask Earl Hale something, so I granted his wish. We also made a proper report prior to him going out, right?”

“Proper, you say? Vernoux-dono, don’t anger me too much. You left His Highness and pretended to be him. Then, you deceived me until he returned. And you say you 『reported』 it?!”

“Isn’t it fine? If it’s needed, even if I substitute for His Highness, it was proven by the people around us that they didn’t notice, was it not? This is proof that my substitute technique is skilled.”

“Wh.....?!”

“I think it’s an important lesson, in many ways, you know?”

Vernoux was talking with Clive frankly, but Clive looked really irritated.

“..... Your Highness, why are you laughing?”

“No, sorry.”

Indeed, even Clive wouldn’t say, “Have you reflected, Your Highness?” But, I think the fact that I didn’t regret sneaking out has been conveyed to him. The slightly exaggerated sigh that I could hear coming from him was proof.

I’ve only known Clive for a short amount of time, but even I know that he is earnest, and recognises himself as our watchdog. And I also thought that he was the opposite of Vernoux.

Vernoux was very flexible with things, and that was why he was acting as an intermediary between Dilly and me. However, in other words, there was a part of him that thought, 『it’s okay if we don’t get caught』. Compared to him, Clive was very serious. He was faithful to his principles, enough for Vernoux to call him hard-headed.

The way those two treated me was, of course, different because their personalities were complete opposites.

To me, Vernoux..... was a good friend to 『Gille』 and 『Sylvester』. Speaking of rash things, he has warned me not to do something in the past, but he was a bad friend who got me caught up in his plots.

On the other side, Clive was by my side at the command of his father. That was probably why he thought of himself as a watchdog..... I can’t say that our relationship is that of friends yet.

By no means do I hate Clive. Instead, I think that he is a reliable person. So, I want to be friends with him; now then, how do I become friends with him?

“..... Your Highness. Please don’t go out of the castle whenever you want, until the Founding Festival is over.”

“I know.

“If you really don’t understand this, then the castle will seriously be closed off.”

“Everyone would be troubled if that were to happen, so I’ll behave myself.”

Clive said gravely, and I answered while smiling wryly. Apparently, he feels as if I am not listening to him. I promised, once again, when I saw him frown.

“Don’t worry. I’ve already stretched my wings, so I’ll properly act as 『His Highness』 during the Founding Festival.”

“..... Okay. But, please restrain yourself from going out after that too.”

In the first place, I didn’t intend to neglect my duties. On that day too, I did as Vernoux said; I finished all my work and went out when I had time..... However, I didn’t inform them when I would return to the castle and had Vernoux change his appearance and go back to the castle first. The ability to disguise oneself was really reassuring to have on one’s side, but I think it’s an ability that I definitely wouldn’t want my enemy to have.

“Then, we’ll change places so that you won’t find out next time he comes home.”

“Vernoux-dono.”

The voice of Clive, who replied to Vernoux’s half-joking words, sounded like the ground had frozen over. I couldn’t help but laugh at that, but I knew which one was irate.

“..... Clive, won’t you forgive Vernoux? He was only following my selfishness.”

It would have been different had Vernoux invited me to go out. But, I had asked him to help me sneak out, and he’d just accepted. He hadn’t been reluctant to do it, but that probably couldn’t be used as an excuse. If I hadn’t asked him to help me, then he probably wouldn’t have had to write a reflection like that.

But, Clive’s tone got deeper at my words.

“No matter what Your Highness says, Vernoux-dono needs to reflect. This much is obvious from his current behaviour.”

“.....”

I should have stopped this earlier, I thought, but I also felt that Vernoux would irritate Clive, even if he had said something else.

“How rigid, Clay. And, it’s too early for you to be so obnoxious at this age.”

Despite me wondering how I should reply, Vernoux once again threw words out to tease Clive.

This isn’t good. Although Vernoux was pouting, he was definitely having fun. They weren’t words used to convince someone.

If Vernoux is having that much fun, then I don’t have to force myself to come up with a reply..... as I thought that, I felt uncomfortable.

..... Clay?

“..... What’s with that name?”

There was no way the person himself wouldn’t notice that.

“Well, if I called you Clive, then you would make a face that says, 『I really don't want to let you call me by my name』, right? Clive Leif Eames. If you read the first letters of your name it becomes Clay, right? [1]”

“I've never heard of such an abbreviation. Why do I have to be called that in the first place?”

“It's a pet name, do you have a problem with that?”

“I'll ask you in return, where is there not a problem with that?”

The serious Clive said, “Where should I retort?” and twitched his face. However, it didn't seem like Vernoux cared at all.

“I don't mind if you don't add the 『dono』 to my name. Don't worry about it.”

“I have no idea what you're saying.”

Certainly, Vernoux did not reply with an answer that answered Clive's question. However, I was able to understand what Vernoux was doing somehow. He was teasing Clive a lot, but it seemed like he was trying to deepen their friendship..... Probably, I think.

However, at least at this stage, Clive didn't show any signs of understanding his intent. Clive looked so dissatisfied that it could be said that he didn't have any other expressions.

But surprisingly, Clive didn't rebuke Vernoux any further. Perhaps, he thought it was too troublesome to deal with Vernoux so he might have thought that it was useless to say anymore.

But from that attitude, Vernoux decided to call Clive, Clay from now on. Even if Clive refused to give him permission to do so, Vernoux would continue to say the same thing until he received approval. Vernoux was a skilful talker, so I don't think many could win against him in that aspect.

“..... Then, can I also call you Clay?”

“Your Highness.”

“Joking. Clive, can I end the greetings here?”

I shrugged my shoulders as he glared and handed him the homework I had received. This was the greetings used for the Founding Festival.

I have not yet been given the opportunity to greet the general public since I still haven't reached adulthood. But still, I had the chance to do my greetings in extremely private circles. Just because I gave Clive what I had just written, didn't mean that he would correct the manuscript. But, if he had set himself up as my watchdog, then he would read what I just gave him. It was embarrassing to show someone something I had written, but I could do it without hesitation if I put up with that feeling here.

“..... I will give this to the teacher.”

He didn't really point out anything in particular. He seemed to have understood me and folded the letter in half.

“I'll leave it to you.”

When I said that, the sounds of an imitated bell rang throughout the room.

When I looked at the clock, I saw that it was two in the afternoon.

“Your Highness, it’s about time.”

I stood up as I listened to Vernoux, who was also looking at the clock.

Today was the day of my match with Earl Pameradia.

“Clive, do you mind if I go?”

“..... Go ahead.”

Clive probably didn’t want to let me go. His voice was mixed with a bit of a sigh, and I got the impression that he just agreed because I would go even if he tried to stop me. He might also see it as bad if I were late since the Royal family was the one who invited the Earl here.

Unfortunately, I was pressed for time, and it would be hard to convince Clive right now.

“We’re leaving, Your Highness. Vernoux-dono, stay here.”

Apparently, Clive wanted to come with me to the training hall too. He warned Vernoux and opened the door for me to walk through.

The training hall was a short distance away from the room, but Clive continued to walk diagonally behind me. It was a lot easier to talk to him if he walked next to me, but he always declined. *He could relax a bit more*, I thought, but that seemed difficult if we didn’t become a little closer. If possible, I wanted to talk to him a bit more, so that we can get to know each other, but it couldn’t be helped.

He might be a little bit less stiff if I acted as 『Clive’s ideal Prince』. I somehow understand what image Clive had of a Prince.

But, nothing would really change even if Clive recognised me as a 『Wonderful Prince』 from me changing only my outward behaviour. *Was there any point in just smoothing things over?* Clive was going to be someone who I will associate with for a long time. Therefore, as much as possible, I didn’t want to fake my true feelings.

Generally speaking, I didn’t think that what Clive was saying was wrong. Therefore, I felt that I would be admitting that my behaviour was wrong if I fake myself.

“What you said was true Clive, but I don’t think I was wrong either.”

“..... Your Highness, did you say something?”

“No, nothing.”

My monologue had not reached Clive. Still, I dare not repeat it.

Setting aside whether I would be praised for my behaviour to not, I am just going to do what I can do. As a Prince, I might say something that is hard to agree with, but bothering people..... Well, I did this

time with Vernoux, but I will bear in mind not to bother people anymore. I'm sorry that I dragged Vernoux into this, but he had suggested it, so I'll return the favour one day.

Of course, I don't want to ignore Clive's ideas. I must amaze him and not give up. On top of that, I felt bad for Clive, but I definitely won't give up.

"Clive, I've caused you a lot of trouble."

"Huh? No."

For a moment, Clive showed a strange reaction to my abrupt words, but I immediately soothed it over. *After a little more time, would I also be able to talk honestly with Clive? I can't adapt to his aspirations, but I think I should try to talk frankly with him.*

If so, then I should start by interacting with him.

"Clive, do you like swords?"

"I wouldn't say I like it. But, it's necessary, so I have to master it to a certain degree."

"I see. Then, have a match with Vernoux and I sometime."

"..... Your Highness is fine, but I would like to beat Vernoux-dono once."

I smiled bitterly at Clive, who said that with a straight face. Considering he said that, he looked quite serious about it. However, I was happy because that competitive side of him would get along well with Vernoux.

But, in contrast to the positive feelings I had, Clive lowered his voice.

"Your Highness, there is something I would like to discuss with you."

"What is it?"

I tilted my head at his tense voice, and he mentioned someone I never thought he would.

"Do you know that Earl Pameradia has a daughter your age?"

"Yeah, Cordelia, right? Vernoux talks about her a lot."

I put my guard up a little while being grateful that I was able to speak.

I can't say that Clive and Dilly have never interacted with each other, but the possibility was high since he had gone to study abroad. So why was her name coming out here? Clive seemed to have felt that I was encouraging him to talk with my expression.

"She might be using Vernoux-dono. Vernoux-dono talking to you about her might also be something she wished to happen."

"Using.....?"

"I don't know what the Earl is thinking. He might be using the opportunity to talk to you, to try and bring his daughter closer to you."

I blinked several times as he continued to give me unexpected advice. Then I felt it. *That's impossible. If that were true, then I wouldn't be able to hold back my laughter.*

"Rest assured. Vernoux isn't that stupid, and she isn't interested in me in the slightest, since before."

"What do you.....?"

"I have met Cordelia before at the Flantheim mansion. However, we only exchanged greetings, and she had fun talking with other ladies her age."

I wanted to talk with her more if possible. She would converse with 『Gille』, but one of my worries was that it was hard to talk with her as 『Sylvester』. I regretted it a little that I didn't say it, while confessing that to myself, and smiled wryly.

However, Clive didn't frown even though he heard words from me that sounded as if I was inflicting damage to myself.

"It would be fine if that were true....."

I don't think he doubted my words. As far as Clive was concerned, Dilly and I have never interacted with each other, so that was only natural. But there probably was a reason why he still wasn't convinced.

"Do you not have a good impression of her?"

"....."

Clive didn't deny my words. However, he did stop looking a little unpleasant. I have never seen Clive have that reaction before. Judging from his appearance, he didn't seem to have a clear basis for his remark.

However, I don't think Clive was the type of person to think badly of someone without reason.

"I'm not criticising you. I just asked because I was curious. I won't force you to answer if you can't."

"..... I thought that you weren't used to woman, Your Highness."

"Huh? Perhaps, are you worried that I would be seduced by someone?"

"I don't know what to make of those words being used by you..... But, yes."

Is that really something he should worry about when Dilly is only 12? I thought for a moment and thought that things like that did happen in this world while listening to Clive's next claim.

"The Pameradia House has a strong influence. And I've heard that the Earl, who has this strong influence, has had strong ambitions since long ago. And I've heard that his daughter is beautiful."

Clive spoke earnestly until the end. But that thing..... Instead, I couldn't deny that with the present condition, when it was something I desired.

"Indeed, if I get a proposal like that from the Pameradia House, then it's true I must consider it a bit. It's hard to completely ignore it."

"Yes."

“But, the Earl doesn’t want power that much. I don’t know about the past, but right now he doesn’t. Father said so. Also..... The Earl loves Cordelia a lot, so he wouldn’t even let her marry into the Royal family if the man isn’t good enough.”

Again, my words pierced at my heart as I calmly stated those reasons. However, Clive didn’t seem convinced, even with those reasons. But it was a bit difficult for me to state any more reasons calmly.

However, of course, Cordelia didn’t think like that, and the Earl probably didn’t as well. The Earl already completely controls the critical parts of the political world, and there may be rumours that he could easily restrain the other nobles. But even so, the Earl would be careful not to mess up the current state of affairs, even if he were to cause a boycott ——, or so father said. And, I already remembered what he said at the same time, “Elvis had the tendency to be too impatient ten years ago, but he has become very calm. Is the existence of his daughter that big?”

At any rate, the older brothers of Dilly, Cyrus and Isma, had never recommended their younger sister to me, either. I wanted them to tell me..... But, it was too bad.

“..... However, please think about it. If the Earl loves his daughter that much, then you won’t know what he would do for her. And it wouldn’t be odd if he raised a thoughtless daughter.”

Clive had said that because he was anxious. But, I would be offended if he kept talking bad about Dilly.

“Many people are blinded by power around Your Highness. You’ll have the opportunity to talk to a lot of ladies at the Founding Festival, regardless of whether or not they’re from this kingdom, and there may be those who consider Your Highness as theirs.”

“I know that even without you telling me. I have been 『His Highness』 for more than 10 years after all.”

“I am not joking.”

“I’m also not joking.”

However, I finally realised it once I countered him. *Oh, Clive has been saying too much because of the Founding Festival. Indeed, it is the season where a lot of ladies come..... But, Dilly, the person whom Clive is worried about, probably wouldn’t come to the festival this year either.*

When the heck can, I finally talk to her in this appearance?

“Your Highness?”

“Ah, sorry. I was thinking.”

“I see.”

“However, don’t worry. There are certainly people who want to approach me with wicked desires. However, they are not the only ones to approach me. You understand that when you look at yourself and Vernoux, don’t you?”

“.....”

“Even if I look like this, I can judge people.”

Clive's expression became very hard to read when I said that jokingly. *Is this because he doesn't agree with my words? Or is he rejecting the fact that I brought up Vernoux's name? In any case, it seems like I can't get him to agree with me right now.*

"I'm not saying it has to be right now, but I'll appreciate it if you can understand it."

"....."

Clive didn't reply to my wish. However, I decided that he was interpreting the meaning since he didn't deny it. So..... I requested him to do one thing to deepen his understanding of this.

"Let's see..... For that reason, first of all, could you call me 『Sylvester』?"

"Excuse me?"

"Names are important, aren't they? 『His Highness』 feels a little distant. If you like, I don't mind if you use an abbreviation like 『Clay』."

"....."

Clive looked like he had a hard time replying to my words, and then he cleared his throat quietly before long.

"Understood, Sylvester-sama. I would like to call you this, but you can call me whatever you want, Sylvester-sama. As long as it's not Vernoux-dono, you can call me Clay."

"Thanks."

It was just a compromise, but he had said my name. I felt a little closer to him, and my mood improved. *It would be nice if Dilly could also call me 『Sylvester』.*

We got close to the training hall while we were talking, and the Earl had already arrived.

"..... It would be nice if I could get a blow in today."

Although I had said that, I couldn't endure half the time. Although I thought that I would do it today, the only image that springs to my mind is of me being overwhelmed by him.

"Your Highness. If you imagine yourself losing, then you'll only lose."

"Yeah, thanks."

I'm sure Clive can't see me winning, but I'm glad that he's supporting me and cheering for me.

"I'll do my best. I also need to be diligent so that I'm not being rude to the Earl, who is giving me his precious time."

Those are my true feelings, but I also had a lot of hidden feelings that I couldn't say out loud, like: I won't look good if I keep losing forever and I don't know if Dilly can use swords. However, I would probably never get a blow on the Earl no matter how much time passes if I think like that. I thought that as I braced myself.

↑¹ This works in Japanese because the first letters of his name becomes グレイ, which is Clay but not so much in English and I tried to get the English ones... But it just looks weird.

Act 22: Festival Prelude and Honey Lemon

A few days after Cordelia heard about Christina from Cyrus.

Cordelia was holed up in her laboratory the day before the Founding Festival started. Emina, her maid, was in the room with her.

“Ojou-sama, would you like another cup of tea?”

“Thanks. Yes, please.”

Neither Ronnie, who worked as her experimental assistant, nor Lara, the small apprentice girl, were by her side. Both of them had gone out to town that day.

The period before and after the Founding Festival were holidays for the servants of the Pameradia House.

Of course, not all of them took time off at once. Every year, around this time, Elvis would stay at the castle, so there were no visitors, and the schedules were easy to set up. The basic idea for the servants was that they enthusiastically made it through the work, even if the workload increased a little since they would get holidays in turn. She told Ronnie, before he went out today, that it would be a loss if he didn't go to see the bustling streets while the Founding Festival was on, even though he lived in the Royal Capital and Elvis had told him to rest. According to Ronnie, a lot of street stalls were already set up, even a day before the festival started.

(I also want to go if I hear something like that.)

Cordelia resented Ronnie a little since she had finally decided to wait until she became an adult to go to the Founding Festival, but there was a horrible adult who was weakening her resolve. Of course, it wasn't like she could go, even if he didn't, so she wanted him to enjoy it as much as he could if he went; but she wanted him to give her delicious fruits if he found some.

(..... But, I am extremely reluctant to stay home when I think that I might find a caravan that sells Japanese things, like the fox mask Gille-sama had.)

She did miss those things, and she was also curious because she might find something interesting.

(Even so, I'll control myself. But I want to hear them talk about it later.)

Vernoux-sama and Gille-sama will probably go to the festival. Vernoux-sama will probably come around for sweets as always, and Gille-sama will probably tell me cheerfully about the festival. And, if I remember the things they tell me, then I can have a good time at the festival in the future.

Cordelia thought that, and she became worried about one thing. That was that Emina was currently not scheduled in for any holidays.

“The festivals finally here, so I don't mind if Emina takes some time off.”

She was extremely thankful that Emina, who she was familiar with, was by her side, but it wasn't like she couldn't do anything without Emina. Other servants didn't understand Cordelia as well as Emina did, but they were all considerate people.

“Thank you for your concern, Ojou-sama. But, it’s fine.”

“It’s finally time for the festival, you know? Or do you dislike busy places?”

It’s bad if she’s mindful of me, but it also feels uncomfortable to force it. Emina continued smiling at Cordelia who had tilted her head in curiosity.

“I will take a proper holiday.”

She said, and Cordelia couldn’t comprehend the true meaning behind those words, and was hesitant to keep on asking.

(Emina also didn’t rest during the Founding Festival last year, or the year before that either, did she?)

Though I would keep pressing her to take a holiday if she shows a little reservation. She thought, though if Emina didn’t seem reserved at all, then the correct thing to do was rely on her favour.

“I don’t mind, if that’s what you say, Emina……. But instead, you have to take a proper break, okay? It’s a promise.”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

Alright, it’s a promise. If she still doesn’t take a break, then I’ll get Otou-sama to order her to. She thought, however, she recalled that Emina had taken a little break last year, at the end of the Founding Festival.

(…… People who don’t like taking breaks don’t exist, right?)

The reason why it had changed slightly into a question was that half-way through thinking, she remembered how Elvis worked. Thus, she became unsure.

(I wonder if I should say selfish things to Otou-sama after the Founding Festival is over so that he doesn’t collapse from overworking himself.)

Of course, I don’t intend to trouble him, but it’s vital for him to rest his body. If he doesn’t, then he might have health problems.

(I wonder if I should tell him that I want to have lunch with him next time.)

She handed Emina the empty cup and decided. *Alright, I’ll definitely get Otou-sama and Emina to take a break.*

However, that was after the Founding Festival. It wasn’t something she could do right then.

That being the case, she had no choice but to treat them like usual until then.

“Emina, I want to write a reply to Isma-oniisama’s letter. Can you get me a pen and paper?”

“Understood.”

Emina immediately prepared several types of paper and pens in compliance with Cordelia’s wish. She chose a white, floral embossed paper, and began to slowly write out the letters.

It was the first time she had received a letter from Isma that wasn't a reply to her own. She was also surprised that Isma, who would always accompany her when he came home, would write a letter to her, which was different from usual.

The contents of the letter were a request to Cordelia.

A junior knight in the 2nd Imperial Guards, where Isma worked, got athlete's foot.

When she had first heard that, she felt that there was a massive gap between the image of a knight and getting athlete's foot.

No, it's not like I don't understand. A knight is also human. They can catch athlete's foot. She re-thought and once again read the letter; apparently, this junior knight had caught athlete's foot during his northern mission.

『It seems like he has no idea that he has athlete's foot. But he won't say his feet hurt, because he doesn't want to look bad; so it seems like he's really enduring it. I don't know how itchy it is for him, but he is clearly putting up with something.』

A feeling of sympathy was flowing out from the words Isma had composed.

(I wonder if during his northern mission means..... that he didn't bother to change his socks.)

If so, then I can't be impressed since it would have been smelly, Cordelia thought. Also, there was nothing desirable about leaving athlete's foot as is, since it was highly infectious. Fortunately, Isma had taken that knight to the infirmary at once, but then a problem occurred.

『He did receive medicine, but he has anti-magic. The magic medicine that the Royal Palace is so proud of doesn't work well on him.』

『Anti-magic』 was a unique ability from birth, which made it hard for magic to affect that person. Therefore, they didn't receive much damage from attack magic as combatants, but they were incompatible with the military treatments, as they used magic. Their anti-magic abilities also manifested when they use medicines mixed with magic, so the effects of such medicine were hindered.

『It's not like the medicine isn't working at all, but he lacks sleep because it keeps itching. It would be troublesome if this were to spread, so the army is trying to mix some medicine that would work for him. However, it seems like that would take some time. Sorry, but could you ask the Head Magician if she knows of any medicine that is good for this? Although we also use magic to refine medicine in our house, it might be effective if the procedure is different.』

The magic of the Pameradia House, who were originally an equestrian tribe, was different from the military's medicine. The military would change the flow of magic to aid medicine once it had entered a body, but the Pameradias used a method that boosted the power of the ingredients, before applying it.

(If that was all Isma-oniisama wanted, then he could have sent the letter to the Head Magician directly... But asking me to do it to cause less trouble, and at the same time checking how I am, sounds like something he would do.)

At any rate, she had to do this task, since he had asked her to. The memo which described the present medicine recipe and patient's symptoms had already been delivered to the Head Magician.

The Head Magician, who saw the description of the symptoms, said, "Shall we prepare the medicine which is often used in Ertiga?" and immediately began to compound it. It seemed that even commoners in the Royal Capital get prescribed medicine that is a little similar to the ones the army used.

(I really don't know anything about medicine.)

However, even Cordelia could recall a method to soothe an itch. She finished writing her letter, stood up and headed to the cupboard.

Then, she took two small bottles from out of the cupboard: one containing roman chamomile essential oil and the other containing tea tree essential oil.

"I might as well send him oil for a foot bath to cope with the athlete's feet."

She muttered, as she went back to the desk and wrote the usage onto a small piece of paper.

『Add one drop of roman chamomile, in the brown bottle, and three drops of tea tree, from the blue bottle, into a bucket of water that is slightly warmer than body temperature; stir well and soak feet for about four and a half hours. Keep the bottles in a dark and cool place.』

He hadn't asked for it, but she wanted him to try it as well if magic didn't work. The letter had passed through her place, so she would be happy if her own knowledge was helpful to him.

"Personally, I like the scent and it would make me happy if he likes it too. I think the warm water would help his blood circulation."

Warming your feet should also lead to a good night's rest.

Cordelia finished the letter with 『Get better soon』 after the description.

She put the letter into an envelope and the small bottles into a tiny box, but she was worried about the gaps in the box. Of course, she could stuff the box with paper so that the bottles don't break, but she felt that would be a waste.

"..... Since I'm already sending him a letter, I should send him something too."

She muttered, and she took a small bottle of sage essential oil and orange essential oil from the cupboard this time. Then, with the two bottles in hand, she took out a small flat can from the next drawer. The can was something that people usually put ointments in; it was flat and was divided from top to bottom.

Cordelia returned to the desk and opened the lid of the small flat can. There were small fragments of bisque in the can. The fragments were white and shaped like flowers.

"I feel like this is a bit too cute for Onii-sama..... But, this is all I have right now."

Those fragments were called Aroma Stones in her previous life.

It was possible to enjoy the scent of the fragrance for several days if you put four or five drops of essential oils onto the fragments. She dropped the same amount of both essential oils onto the fragments from the two small bottles. This scent combined with the two essential oils let one enjoy a nice quiet sleep. Isma liked citrus type foods, so she thought he would like it. She added a few lines onto the paper saying that she wanted him to keep it at his bedside and that he should add more essential oils onto it if the scent disappears.

“Emina, I want you to arrange this, so it would be delivered to Onii-sama. The medicine made by the Head Magician would be sent with this, and I want you to deliver all this today if it’s finished.”

“Certainly. I will confirm with her.”

“I’ll leave the letter with you. If the medicine isn’t finished yet, then send the package when it is.”

Emina bowed at Cordelia’s words and left the room.

Cordelia, who was left behind in the room, leant back lightly on the chair and thought about what would happen after the Founding Festival.

(I’d like to meet the teacher who gave the aloe vera to Gille-sama, but I would also like to ask Eris firm for some paper. However, I’ll also need an estimate from the other firms as well. But, it would be difficult to do these things if the Founding Festival is still on.)

Also, I want to go to the fief at least once, if I can, but the tutor’s lessons will resume once again after the holidays are over. Do I have that much time?

“..... I have a lot of free time, but I feel like it’s not enough.”

Cordelia wanted to lightly hold her head. *If I’m this busy while I’m a child, how much busier will I be after I’ve become an adult?*

But, there was nothing she could do, even if she worried about it. The thing that she could do now was arrange her schedule. Meeting Gille’s teacher depended on his situation, so that wasn’t a problem that involved her schedule. Eris firm would probably arrange a meeting that suited her schedule, so that they would negotiate. She could get estimates from the other firms during the Founding Festival and present it to Elvis when the festival ended.

“Even though I want to inspect the fief, I don’t have to do it right now.....”

Even so, she also wanted to visit as soon as possible. She wanted to see the state of the school and the crop situation, but she had another reason why she wanted to go..... She wanted to create a herb garden in the fief.

Currently, she was growing herbs in a field that she had borrowed near the Royal Capital, as well as her greenhouse. Therefore, the fertilisers and cultivations methods handled outside of the greenhouse were gradually improving, but the current number of herbs that she had still wasn’t enough if she wanted to commercialise it.

“The cultivation cost would be lower in the fief, compared to the Royal Capital, and the transportation costs wouldn’t be very high either, in Ertiga, since they do a lot of trading. If possible, I want to make it a local speciality.”

If she wanted to distribute cosmetics and balms, then she needed to think about the branding. She certainly had to cultivate and process all of it at the fief if she wanted to show that the Pameradia House was the best. It was difficult for others to perform the same type of magic manipulation that she, herself, had inherited from the Pameradia’s, but she began making plans for the workshop and production in her mind.

The problem was where to build the herb garden; there were places in the fief where the grade of the wheat grown was relatively low, and where the yield was unstable. There were methods for improving the fertiliser, and production techniques, but those methods weren’t going well because of the soil. She could probably get those areas to cooperate with her if she appealed that they could stabilise their incomes. It also depended on the type of herb, but fortunately, she also thought that weeds with strong natures were easier to increase than wheat harvest.

(It might be too extravagant, but I think that it could be an industry that would stop people from leaving depopulated areas.)

Population biases existed even in the fief. It would be difficult for her to be okay with one, but it would be an appealing part of the area, and she hoped it would help.

However, while she held such hopes, some problems had already occurred to her then.

“No matter what, the biggest problem would be the funds. Even if I keep doing my best, while barely keeping the business running, I still need a year’s worth of funds. I have profits from the cameos, but if I use too much, then it would hinder other things.”

There were other methods of obtaining money, like trading with other products. However, it wasn’t easy to find which items would become popular. She had gotten lucky with the cameos.

As a last resort, she could ask Elvis to give her a loan. She thought that it was possible to get him to help her if she made a presentation that could convince him to.

(But it feels uncomfortable to have him pay that much. It would be like nothing has changed since four years ago.)

I don’t think it’s wrong to use powers that can be used. Even so, I don’t want to bother people, just as much as I want results. If I had business skills, then this might have ended without me worrying this much, —— she thought and was surprised.

“Wait. That’s right. There is. There might be somewhere I could borrow money from.”

The place that came to her mind was the Eris firm, where she was going to request blank papers from.

She had heard from Ronnie that the firm wanted to approach the Pameradia House if they could find a business opportunity.

“Even if my plan fails, I don’t think the Eris firm wouldn’t be able to get their money back. What I can predict is that the Pameradia House would fall to ruin if I fail.”

Even Cordelia didn’t want to cause trouble for her house. However, it wouldn’t become collateral, even if she said it out loud. Although she would be using her house name, she thought that amongst the plans that she came up with, this was the most fitting one. In the first place, if she could convince the Eris firm, then a business professional would have approved that it would make a profit. It was also possible to receive advice from a merchant’s standpoint.

It wasn’t like she couldn’t think of a use for her house name. She would be glorifying the life of a lady, although the commoners’ aesthesis would remain. She wanted to have a good grasp of how big her house’s name was, but it was also true that she was also puzzled over using it.

(I know I’m inconsistent. And, the reason why I think that is probably because I’m not confident that I’m using my power correctly.)

I have to be firmer, she thought, as she lightly put her hands together and massaged her palms.

“..... Alright, my mind is clear. But, I’ll need something sweet to steadily reboot my mind.”

Cordelia, who said that and stood up, put her hand in a cupboard that was different from the cupboard that contained her essential oils. There were three lemons in a shallow basket. The lemons, which Ronnie used when he brewed his tea, were stored here. She took a lemon from the basket and cut it into two with her magic. The fresh scent spread throughout the room, but she didn’t enjoy it and stuck it straight into a skewer.

“I’ll warm it a little and then cool it down, then I’ll eat it together with honey. It’s delicious.”

There were traces of this building having a simple kitchen before it was built into the laboratory, and there was a magic tool that was like a portable stove in the corner of the room. Therefore, she could make something like that freely. Honey was also placed in the cupboard some time ago, so she could also use it freely.

When she grilled the lemon, a knock from the door reached her ears.

“Come in.”

Cordelia, who thought that Emina had returned, continued to grill the lemon as she called out towards the door. Then, the person who had opened the door silently wasn’t Emina, but Elvis.

“Otou-sama!”

She didn’t think that Elvis would be there, and quickly turned off the stove; she put the lemon onto a plate and approached him. The other day, Cyrus had also shown up suddenly, and she felt that the father and son pair were even alike in that aspect.

Elvis said to his daughter who was rushing, “It’s fine for you to relax.”

“I’ll be going to the castle from now. Cyrus and Isma will also be away for a few days, so if something happens then tell Hans.”

“Okay, please take care of yourself.”

I see, so he came to remind me, she concluded.

She had known for a few days that her parent would be gone from the mansion, but Elvis was still worried about her. However, this wasn't the first year that this had happened. This had happened last year and the year before that; it was the same exchange she had with him every year. Fortunately, it had never been a problem before, thanks to Hans and the other servants. Nevertheless, it was still reassuring to know that she didn't have to hesitate if something suddenly happened.

However, there was one thing different about Elvis, who was always reliable.

“Otou-sama, mm.....”

“What's wrong?”

“Your voice is a little...”

“It'll heal soon.”

She could usually feel the pressure behind his voice, but today it was a little hoarse.

Is it because he's swamped? It seems that Otou-sama, who is incredibly trained, can also get sick. However, is he not worried because it always heals before it gets worse?

But, his days are going to get busier from now on.

“Otou-sama, do you have a little time? I will prepare something gentle for your throat.”

“..... You will?”

“Yes. I was just making it before.”

Elvis didn't reply to that. Instead, he sat down onto a nearby chair.

Cordelia watched him as he did and quickly began preparing.

The lemon which had been warmed by the fire was brown on the surface. It was still warm, but she cooled it down a little with her magic. Then, she took a fruit knife and removed the skin, served it on a plate and mixed it with honey from the cupboard.

“Please have some.”

The forks on the edge of the plates were ones that Lara had bought from the market, and it was a little fancy for Elvis to use, but she wanted him to overlook that for now.

Elvis's expression didn't change, even as he used the cute fork and brought the lemon to his mouth.

“Does it suit your tastes?”

“..... Yeah, it's not bad.”

Cordelia laughed lightly at his awkward compliment.

“I’m glad. If it’s fine with you, then I would like to send you some to eat at night too. Otou-sama, your throat is important.”

“Okay. So, you can cook too?”

“.....”

She certainly did do something; she had 『prepared』 something, but she didn’t feel like she had reached the levels of 『cooking』 it. However, Elvis was dead serious, and he wasn’t teasing her, so she felt it difficult to refute him.

(I’ve never held something like a kitchen knife, ever since I was born as Cordelia, but I think I can cook more dishes. I just don’t have the chance.....!)

Should I try to make something once to raise Otou-sama’s assessment a little more? From his reaction right now, it doesn’t seem like he’s frowning because he’s worried..... his daughter is cooking or something.

In front of the troubled Cordelia, Elvis ate one lemon after the other.

“It tastes nostalgic.”

He uttered, and Cordelia tilted her head.

It was an unexpected sentiment. She had never seen Elvis eat anything like that before, and she had never seen him eat honey.

“Nostalgic?”

He might have tasted it a long time ago because it was a nostalgic taste. However, Cordelia had never seen something like this presented at the mansion until now. *Was this food popular before or something?* She thought curiously, but she didn’t get a definite reply.

“I thought I couldn’t eat it anymore, but the future is a mystery.”

“Otou-sama, do you not dislike this taste?”

“I don’t.”

“Then, I’ll always make it for you. You can tell me whenever you want to eat it.”

It was also hard for Cordelia to imagine that Elvis would say that he wanted to eat honey lemons. If he was someone who would say something like that, then the chefs would have made it by now. However, if it was easier to say that to her than order a chef to make it, then it was easy to gift it to him if he didn’t dislike it.



Elvis didn't reply to Cordelia's offer. He ate up all the food on the plate and stood up.

"I'm leaving."

"Please take care. I will wait for you to return."

And then, Elvis left, and Emina came back.

Emina restrained Cordelia, who was trying to clean up the plate, by taking it.

"If you had waited, then I could have made it for you."

"Otou-sama was here. He looked like he'd caught a cold, so I prepared it for him."

Actually, she left aside the fact that she had prepared it because she had wanted to eat it herself; as she said that, Emina looked convinced.

"Say, Emina. Otou-sama had said that the taste of honey lemon was nostalgic to him, but is it the same for you?"

"Nostalgic, you say?"

Emina looked as if she was thinking about Cordelia's question for a bit.

"I'm not very familiar with it, but..... I hear that there is an area to the south where they often drink honey tea. I heard that Master visited there a lot when he was younger so he might have eaten it there."

"I see."

"Ronnie, who's from the south, might know about it more."

"Then, I think I'll also treat Ronnie to it next time."

At any rate, it was a bit cute to put Elvis and honey together.

"Well, I guess I'll have to practice more so that I can treat Otou-sama to it again. Shall we eat together Emina?"

"Yes. But Ojou-sama, I will make it this time."

"It's fine once in a while, right?"

Emina didn't agree with Cordelia, who was laughing because she wanted to practice, and the lemon went into Emina's hands. Apparently, it was okay for Cordelia to make it for herself to eat, but Emina didn't approve of Cordelia making it for Emina to eat.

And the honey lemon that Emina made, as she was used to cooking, tasted better than the one Cordelia had made.

(She's a wonderful role model.)

I made a promise to send Otou-sama some honey lemon at night, but should I get Emina to direct me from now? She thought as she carried the lemon into her mouth.

In any case, Emina was an excellent maid whom she could rely on.

Translator: Blushy

Editor: SenjiQ

Hello everyone! So I finally bought all the light novels.... and it turns out the author put everyone's names in English at the back!

Gille's name is supposed to be Gilles. <- I have no idea where the 's' is coming from. Should I change his name in previous chapters, or are you okay with Gille?

Sherry's name is Shelley! The katakana could have been read either way. Her name hasn't shown up much so I've changed this and will put it as Shelley in the future!

Intermission 02: The Prince and the Red Rose

Blessed with a mild climate, the Founding Festival that everyone enjoys starts tomorrow..... Just when I thought that.

I was stopped by a junior, who had changed his expression. I listened to his message and also walked as fast as I could to a specific person. I really wanted to run, but this was inside of the Royal Palace; we weren't allowed to run in here unless something big happened. ——— But, the thing that happened now was also significant.

『Yo, Isma! Long time no see! 』

『I hope you have fun this year too, Your Highness Ferdinando. You arrived very early.』

『I thought I would surprise you. But, you're really stiff. I wish you would talk more comfortably.』

We were talking in a foreign language, but it was an honour to be told to speak in a friendlier manner. However, I couldn't agree with him.

Because the person in front of me was a prince from another kingdom, who came for the Founding Festival.

And during the Founding Festival, I would be responsible for protecting this person. Of course, His Highness Ferdinando has his own guards from his kingdom, but each kingdom had its own rules, so, in short, I was his local guide.

This was the third year that I was in charge of His Highness Ferdinando's protection. However, I hadn't expected to be a guard in the first place, but I, who was in charge of another duty, was stopped by him and he said something rash while I was wondering what was going on, 『Can I request this person as my guard?』 As a result, I was placed as his guard. Later, I heard that the person who was in charge of him was hard-headed, so he wanted to change to someone more flexible..... Even I was working diligently while complying with the rules, so why did he think that I would be flexible? I tried asking him about that once, but unfortunately, I couldn't get a clear answer.

However, I also thought about it. His Highness Ferdinando was quite eccentric.

I've never heard of any other royalty who would come earlier than expected, just because they thought they could surprise people. If this were known in his home kingdom, then he would be scolded, 『What do you think appointed times are for!?!』 His cheerful personality was likeable, but I could sympathise a little with others around him since they were probably troubled since he was too wild. At the same time, I was thankful from the bottom of my heart for my Prince's honest personality. I believe that our Prince's nature wouldn't change, even if he reached His Highness Ferdinando's age.

No, well, His Highness Ferdinando was honest too. It was difficult to respond to his friendliness, but he didn't have a lousy personality, and he didn't say absurd things that were difficult to answer to.

『You still don't have a household?』

『Is that something you say as soon as you meet someone?』

『Well, I'm worried about it. If you get married, then I'd have to congratulate you.』

I laughed dryly in time with his loud laughter. *Let me correct that at once, he does say things that leave me troubled, but well, he is an easy-going person, so it doesn't feel unpleasant.*

『Then, how about my little sister? It might be interesting for Isma to become my little brother.』

『You jest.』

『Then, I don't care if I take your sister. She'll become my second wife though.』

『You joke.』

He laughed happily at me, who was drained. But that joke was honestly bad for my heart. I was fully aware that he wasn't serious, but I don't know what would happen if those words were to reach my father. So, I didn't want him to say them aloud, even if it was a joke. I honestly couldn't imagine it. I want to live in peace. He had already stopped laughing for a while now, but he didn't notice how I was feeling at all.

『However, I'm glad you were surprised, but I want to enjoy this free time. Is there a place for me to waste time? 』

『Let's see.....』

Of course, the guest rooms have already been set up, even though something unexpected had happened, but he wanted entertainment. It wasn't a waiting room. However, I couldn't say something like, "Then, do you want to go to town?" If I took this person there, then I don't think I would have enough energy for the rest of my life. If he had to go at any cost, then I hope that he would do it on the last day. But, if there was something else that was rare, then what about the greenhouse that was built under father's supervision?

『Have you ever seen the greenhouse before, Your Highness?』

『The greenhouse? Ooh, I hear that it's great, but I've never visited it before.』

『Then, I will go confirm if you're allowed to see it, could you please wait for a moment?』

『Alright.』

I don't think that a tour would be rejected, but there was a possibility that people were working inside of the greenhouse. Luckily the greenhouse tour was quickly approved.

When we arrived at the greenhouse, His Highness Ferdinando looked up at the ceiling.

『The rumours appear to be true, it's a splendid building.』

『Do you like it?』

『Yeah. It's rare. There are a lot of plants, but there are also butterflies.』

I proceeded through the greenhouse with him, who, if I had to say, was more interested in the building itself and the butterflies than the flowers; and before long, we saw a shadow sitting in the chair in the direction we were walking.

A little boy with gold eyes and black hair. It was unquestionably the prince of our kingdom, His Highness Sylvester.

“..... in..... nk.”

His Highness repeated his words in a whisper.

From his appearance, I could tell that he was probably practising for his speech for the Founding Festival. Of course, I hadn't planned to interrupt him, since I hadn't known he was here, but we would if we continued walking. I felt sorry about this, but His Highness Ferdinando looked as if he was happy.

..... I'm sorry, Your Highness. I brought a disturbance with me.

His Highness Sylvester also seemed to have noticed that people were approaching him.

He turned around, and his round eyes met with mine.

“Excuse me, Your.....”

“Yo! You the Highness Sylvester?”

His Highness Ferdinando interrupted my words and spoke a bit clumsily in the language used in Crista Kingdom, which made His Highness Sylvester look a little surprised, but he immediately smiled.

『It's been a long time, Your Highness Ferdinando. I sincerely thank you for travelling for so long to get here.』

Even though we had shown up here unexpectedly, His Highness Sylvester replied in His Highness Ferdinando's home language, which he usually didn't use. His Highness Ferdinando's eyes widened in surprise.

『You're really good. Your pronunciation is more natural than I sound when I speak the language of this kingdom.』

『Those are generous words.』

Even I knew that His Highness Ferdinando's words towards His Highness Sylvester weren't too generous, but His Highness Sylvester probably thought they were. I think it's a good thing to be humble, but I felt that he could be a little more confident like his friend..... No, Vernoux-dono wasn't only 『a little』 confident.

『But, you've gotten a lot taller. I called out to you, but I thought you might have been someone else for a second there.』

His Highness Ferdinando expressed his surprise with both his hands lightly lifted and His Highness Sylvester's eyes shone.

『Do I look like I've gotten taller?』

『Yes. You look like you'll eventually get taller than me.』

『That is..... I will certainly catch up to you.』

I stared at His Highness Sylvester, who was smiling with joy, and thought it was surprising. *Is he someone who cares about his height? I certainly wanted to be taller than my older brother when I was younger, but I wonder if His Highness, who is easy-going, also wants to grow taller as well. But I don't think that he is too short; his height is about the same as Vernoux-dono, whom he is always with. I wonder if it's because he wants to be an adult soon.*

His Highness Ferdinando was very pleased with His Highness Sylvester's reaction and patted him on the head.

『By the way, what were you doing here?』

『I was practising my speech for a bit.』

『My bad, I've interrupted you.』

『No. I was only reciting it because I couldn't relax. Please don't worry about it.』

I don't know if those words were him being mindful of His Highness Ferdinando, or if he really meant it. But I think that it's unlikely that His Highness Sylvester, who is always thoroughly prepared for anything, would have to practice until the last season this time, so I guess it's just like he said.

There was a red rose blooming right next to His Highness Sylvester. I felt like I've seen that rose somewhere before and became confused. There were more varieties of roses than I could count, and we even had some at our mansion, and it wouldn't be strange for the same things to be blooming at these two places, but it felt weird.

『Isma, what's wrong?』

『No, I just thought that that is a gorgeous flower.』

However, since I had not said the word 『somewhat』, I hadn't lied outright, and only covered it up. His Highness Sylvester also looked at the roses when I'd said that and looked a little embarrassed.

『It's a lovely flower, isn't it?』

『Yes.』

『It calms me down since it feels like it's watching over me.』

“It might sound a little weird,” he laughed.

It's definitely a beautiful flower, but it didn't look different from the rest. The number of petals and the colour of the flower also look common. But it must be different from the rest if it's growing here.

I thought curiously as I concentrated a little magic into my eyes. *Is this type easy to grow or is it disease-resistant?* Such interests welled up within me. However, the characteristics of this flower seemed to be its strong fragrance.

『I feel like this is the type of flower my sister would like.』

『Really?』

『Could you tell me what type it is?』

I continued to ask His Highness Sylvester, who seemed happy for some reason. I thought I could give this as a present to my sister since she would be staying at home by herself during the Founding Festival period.

『……』

『Your Highness?』

It might be a variety that wasn't circulated in the market. However, it was rare for His Highness Sylvester not to answer. At least, it growing here means that it isn't confidential…… No, I've never even heard of a flower that was confidential in the first place.

『Sorry, the name of this flower is a secret.』

The words that came out of His Highness Sylvester, when he finally spoke, he sounded apologetic, but it also sounded as if he was amused. At least, it didn't seem like it was a secret of national interest.

『What is this? Your Highness Sylvester and Isma, you don't have to go out of your way to speak in my language, just speak in your own. I won't think you're having a secret talk, so just take it easy.』

His Highness Ferdinando demonstrated his presence with a slightly exaggerated gesture. *No, we didn't forget about you, you know?*

『Thank you for your concern.』

『No, nope. I'm the one who's visiting your kingdom, but you're speaking in my language. I'm bad at speaking your language, but I don't have any problems with listening.』

“Then, I'll take you up on your offer.”

He probably couldn't refuse His Highness Ferdinando's words. His Highness Sylvester replied with a slightly clearer pronunciation than usual and His Highness Ferdinando looked satisfied at that reply and smiled.

『But, I feel like it's a shame for three men to view flowers. What do you say, Your Highness Sylvester? Are you interested in my sister? I can introduce her to you with confidence. If so, then this place would probably be more fun next year.』

His Highness Ferdinando's words, which were said jokingly, were also asked at me a while ago. While I thought how he could say such a thing instead of a greeting, I also considered that he was probably a little serious when he said it to His Highness Sylvester. His younger sister was probably around His Highness Sylvester's age, and if royalty from a kingdom, where we had good relations, approached other royalty with that, then it was more realistic.

Though, I do think that it was anything more than a joke since he wasn't talking about it directly to His Majesty. Now then, I am interested to see how His Highness would reply.

His Highness Sylvester widened his eyes and blinked several times at those words. This was probably the first time this kind of conversation has been dumped on him. However, he was only surprised for a second, and he relaxed his expression again.

『I'm sure that your sister is probably a humble and beautiful princess.』

『Yeah, I can guarantee that.』

『But, I am still immature.』

Ah, he evaded it well.

If he replied with the same thing even if His Highness Ferdinando replied with, “That’s not true,” then it would be possible to avoid seeing who would hold out longer. His Highness Ferdinando shrugged and laughed.

『Do you want to see more of the greenhouse?』

『No, I don’t mind doing something else if it’s interesting. It is a wonderful building, but I don’t know how to admire flowers.』

『Then, should I get some tea cakes or snacks? I’m sure you’ll enjoy it more than viewing flowers with men.』

『That sounds good. It would be even better if His Highness Sylvester joined us.』

『As long as time permits.』

『You’re a sociable person. Thanks.』

If that’s the case, then I have to quickly go and request the food. His Highness also asked, “Can I leave it to you, Isma?” I bowed and turned to leave.

But the moment I turned my back, His Highness Ferdinando’s words reached my ears.

『Say, Your Highness Sylvester. You said you were still immature before, but would you think about it once you become an adult? 』

His Highness Ferdinando will surely have a childish and mischievous expression on his face right now. But this time His Highness Sylvester didn’t pause.

“When I become an adult, there is someone who I would like to show that appearance to.”

His reply was clear and a little fast. I wanted to turn around, but I controlled myself and pretended that I didn’t hear him.

The person who His Highness Sylvester wants to show his adult appearance to.

Is it Their Majesties? Or does His Highness have someone he loves?

I might be able to understand this a bit better if I could see His Highness Sylvester’s expression, but I couldn’t turn around here, so there’s nothing I can do. His Highness Ferdinando didn’t seem to understand his words well and asked him, 『Could you repeat that? 』 But His Highness Sylvester evaded it by saying, 『It’s a secret.』

I see, so it seems like His Highness Sylvester already has someone he loves.

“I hope you can convey your feelings to her.”

Those words weren't directed at His Highness Sylvester and had just come out, so it should have been spoken in a voice that wouldn't reach his ears. However, I turned around when he stopped me "Isma," and he put his index finger to his mouth. It was an adorable pose, and I chuckled in return.

First of all, it is necessary for me to hasten the preparations for the guest's hospitality, so that His Highness can acknowledge to himself that he is becoming an adult. I thought as I walked a little faster.

Act 23: Calm before the Storm

Three days after the Founding Festival had started.

In a quieter mansion, Cordelia briefly checked on the condition of the greenhouse, and then went back and forth from her room and the library.

The first thing Cordelia started on, during the Founding Festival, was calculating the amount of paper purchased by the school; she'd calculated the approximate amount of paper needed based on a report from the school. Then, she also estimated the cost of Lara's pencils, from her production record, and she also calculated the price for the 'bread erasers'. Finally, she wrote down her aims and the price, then a sentence asking the merchants and Ronnie to get her quotes; Cordelia sighed in relief.

"For now, I wonder if these things will be enough for the school."

The documents were for asking for Elvis's permission.

She had already told him that she was thinking of improving the writing implements, when she was at the pencil manufacturing stage, so she could probably get his permission without any problems. If a problem did pop up, then it would probably be her plan to borrow fields in the fief and open a medicinal herb garden. She had to finish the documents on her plan to cultivate herbs in an area where wheat didn't grow well, and how to collect the capital for that, during the remainder of the Founding Festival so that she could persuade Elvis.

"Should I borrow land and manpower for the herb garden? Or should I just buy already grown plants...? That's becoming a problem. I have documents on the current harvest so I can calculate the income, and I have to write comparison data."

However, Cordelia, who had muttered those words spontaneously, realised that she had been talking to herself a lot. Although, Ronnie and Lara's holidays would end tomorrow, and her surroundings would probably become lively again.

"I think it's Lara's first time at the Founding Festival, I hope she has fun."

She thought as she stretched her back a little. Her body had become really stiff, probably because she was concentrating so hard.

"I'll go for a little walk."

If I push myself too hard, then I might make a mistake in the calculations somewhere. She thought that as she left the room and headed towards the garden.

Cordelia traced the memories of her childhood and remembered that the Pameradia mansion had felt imposing. It still felt imposing now, but it also felt brighter. When she had first visited the fief at the age of eight and returned to the Royal Capital, Elvis had said, "You can grow your favourite plants." Thus, Cordelia had told the gardeners the descriptions of the flowers she wanted grown there, and a few of their names. She didn't have flowers in the greenhouse just for appreciation, but she had wanted to feel relaxed by just looking at flowers, so there were a lot of gorgeous flowers in the garden. By no means, did all the flowers have large petals, but they were all pleasing to the eye.

(It's stunning.)

The flowers glistened vividly, thanks to the skills of the gardeners. And, the rose, 『Cordelia』, was also blooming in a section of the garden. She didn't have a lot of stock yet, but when she told Gille that Elvis had said to her that she could plant whatever she wanted in the garden, he sent her some flowers to grow.

(A rose with the same name as me. It feels strange after all.)

On the one hand, she was happy because it was a beautiful flower and smelt nice, but she became strangely embarrassed when she saw it in front of her. Of course, she knew that the flower thought nothing of her, but she felt compelled not to lose to it.

Then, Cordelia, who was lazing around in the garden, felt herself relax and decided to return to her room. Her eyes also felt a little rested from taking a small break.

Shortly after entering the mansion, Cordelia saw Emina and Hans talking. At the same time, they both noticed that Cordelia had returned and greeted her, “Welcome back, Ojou-sama.” Cordelia smiled wryly.

“I did certainly come back right now..... But you have also just returned, have you not Emina? Have you finished the errands from Christina-sama?”

“I have, Ojou-sama.”

Emina had been called to the Alcott mansion today for a meeting with Christina, whom she had promised to show around the Royal Capital after the Founding Festival. *It's rare to see Emina with no apron on*, Cordelia thought as she thanked her, “Thank you.”

“Christina-sama has stated that she wanted to visit some tailors in the Royal Capital.”

“She wants to visit a tailor?”

“Yes.”

Cordelia was a little surprised because she had been sure that Christina had wanted to go sightseeing.

When people get dresses made in this kingdom, they usually called the tailor to their house. That was the same for noble ladies and for ladies from wealthy merchant families. However, it wasn't like there weren't any exceptions, some people were actively zealous about dresses, and it happened in such situations as 『Anyway, I want to make the colour of the cloth the top priority. I want to see the slight colour differences with my own eyes』 and 『I want to find a tailor who makes designs that are different from the rest』. Besides that, people might ask for patterned orders, but Christina probably didn't fall into those categories.

“She has never made a dress at the Royal Capital before, so she's interested in eight stores. Amongst them are stores that her friends have used before. She also said that she would like to visit more stores if we have time.”

“She wants to go to that many stores? She's very enthusiastic about it.”

Cordelia was a bit surprised that Christina wanted to visit so many places.

She wasn't particularly surprised that Christina hadn't had a dress made in the Royal Capital before since she did live in her fief, but visiting at least eight stores..... Cordelia was a little worried whether Christina would have time to visit that many stores.

(But she lives in the part of the kingdom that produces the best silk. I'm sure she's picky.)

Cordelia also had never visited a tailor before, and she wanted to see what it would be like. There was no way she wouldn't be interested in tailor stores, which had the latest in women's fashion.

(But, isn't it easier for her to get better quality silk in her fief?)

Or did she want to see a lot of dress designs in the Royal Capital? Cordelia tilted her head in curiosity and Emina continued.

"She might get tired while we're visiting the stores, so I also searched for a place where she could eat sweet things. I'm considering a store where a lot of women customers go before they go to the theatre and it opens from noon."

"Oh my, that sounds fun. That's also the experience of a grown woman, isn't it?"

Cordelia said it somewhat jokingly, and Emina smiled loosely.

At the same time, Hans stepped forward and handed Cordelia a bunch of paper.

"Then, there is something that I would like to report to Ojou-sama before you learn that experience. Please take this."

"Thanks. Are these the people who want to participate in the next experiment?"

The papers that Hans had passed to her were a list of people who wished to participate in the balm massage, which Cordelia regularly recruited for. She also invited people to join in with her other experiments, but there was no doubt that this experiment had the highest competition rate in the mansion.

"You have a flood of applicants."

"Yes, thanks."

Cordelia was happy that this experiment was accepted in the mansion to the extent that applicants were rushing in, but she also had mixed feelings about it.

(It's become like some kind of big lottery..... But I feel sorry for people who want to try it out but get rejected.)

Of course, the participants weren't decided by lottery. She decided the participants based on conditions such as physical condition, fatigue, transparency and stagnation of magic. She couldn't say that the sample size was enough since she only recruited from within the mansion, Cordelia could make predictions such as, 『This person seems like they won't like this aroma』 or 『This effect would probably work』, by lightly using her analysis magic. For some reason or another..... That was the only thing she could say, but she was able to conclude if the magic of the plants would be compatible

or not with a person. It might be a unique intuition related to her magic, since Ronnie dismissed it when she tried to explain it to him by saying, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I’m going to meet with them one by one again, so could you show me their work assignment list? I want to talk to them at a reasonable time.”

“Understood.”

Hans respectfully accepted Cordelia’s word, and this time, Emina spoke.

“Ojou-sama, do you have a bit of time now?”

“Yes?”

“I want to talk to you about clothes for going out. There are some possible choices..... If you’re busy, then I would like to take some of your time tomorrow.”

I see I can’t go out in the clothes I use for my experiments or the clothes I wear for riding. And, it was likely that the 『clothes for going out』 that Emina had said, would include accessories such as parasols. And I have never prepared clothes for going out before because my usual dresses are for indoor use.

(This will probably not be finished in 『a bit』.)

It took time to pick dresses and try them on. I don’t remember asking for much, but my closet is full of clothes that were made at the beginning of the season and clothes that Otou-sama gave me.

(But this is the first time I’m going out with Christina-sama. It would be rude if I don’t dress like her.)

I think that all the dresses I have suit me. But, if I consider that I’ll be standing next to Christina-sama, then there would be too many to choose from.

“I’ll do it today. I’m sure it’ll bother me if I do it tomorrow so I won’t be able to focus on anything else.”

Cordelia said that jokingly and Emina and Hans smiled.

Act 24: Boutique in the Noble District

The servants of the Pameradia House also returned to the mansion when the Founding Festival ended.

According to Emina, the Royal Capital was still bustling with more people than usual, but it was much calmer than when the festival was on. Most of the street vendors and tourists were already on their way home.

“So it’ll be easier to go out with Christina-sama now, right?”

“It’s a bit unfortunate.”

“I thought that there would still be some stores left... But, I’m happy to lose the temptations, since we’ll be visiting a lot of stores.”

Cordelia shrugged, and Emina laughed.

Then, there was a knock at the door, and when Cordelia replied, Lara came in.

“Ojou-sama, Christina-sama is here to see you.”

“Okay. I’ll be there right away. Emina.”

“Understood, Ojou-sama.”

“Christina-sama is at the entrance. I wanted to show her to the parlour, but she smiled like a princess and told me that the entrance was fine.”

Lara smiled wryly because she had been entranced by a beautiful person. Cordelia went to the entrance with Emina.

Christina softened her facial expressions when she saw Cordelia.

“It’s been a while, Christina-sama.”

“How do you do, Cordelia-sama? Thank you for today. You too Emina-san.”

The familiar voice, which entered Cordelia’s ears, was moderate and natural. Cordelia smiled and replied, “I’m looking forward to it.”





Cordelia lightly asked Christina about how she was, while the carriage was moving from the mansion to their destination. However, she could only ask things like, “How is Earl Alcott?” and “Aren’t you tired from the Founding Festival?” That wasn’t because it was hard to make conversation with Christina, it was because they had arrived at their destination while they were talking. They hadn’t met in a long time and even asking about how the person was caused a lot of time to pass.

(It’s a shame. But, there’s still time left in the day and I can talk to her when I get off the carriage.)

Cordelia thought as she got off the carriage.

This was the first time that Cordelia had stepped into the district that nobles frequented. After all, she had gotten out of the carriage in front of their mansions when she went to the Flantheim and Hale mansions. And the only place she’d walked around when she was little was the artisan street, and her other outings only consisted of horse-riding to the forest.

She had walked around Ertiga in a dress before, but the atmosphere in the Royal Capital that she had never seen before made her gulp.

(This is a town, right.....?)

Yes, she had unintentionally confirmed that in her mind. She couldn’t help but think that the scene in front of her was like a scene from a musical.

Everyone walking on the white stone pavement was dressed in gorgeous outfits. In the background, there were many large buildings supported by stone pillars, and there was even a huge theatre, and a lot of carriages were running on the roads.

(It’s like I’ve been sucked into a fairy-tale.)

She was used to large spaces because her mansion, and the mansions of her friends, were massive, but buildings lined up next to each other had a different appeal to them. Cordelia reflectively grasped the parasol that was in her hand.

“I heard that they put extra effort into building this area because they also host victory parades here.”

“I saw one the other day. It was really intense.”

Christina continued after Emina’s explanation. Then, she casually asked Cordelia.

“Is this your first time here?”

“Yes, so this surprises me.”

“That’s the same for me. The parade was certainly held here, but I couldn’t see much because there were so many people.”

Christina said, as she smiled and slowly looked around.

"I heard from my friends that this area is most gorgeous when the theatre opens at night. They're currently performing romance plays which are popular with women."

"Oh, a romance?"

"Yes. I heard from my friends that the performers always captivate their audiences, so I hope that we can go watch them someday."

"Thank you very much. Then, I'll have to grow up soon."

Cordelia replied happily to Christina's kind request, but she was also frustrated.

(When it comes to romance, I-..... get really, really irritated.)

Can I really watch the stage until the end? She was being pulled into the conversation so she might not have time to think about such things. *But, can I really watch the performance when I can feel my cheeks going red just by hearing the words 'romance'?* Cordelia desperate tried to calm herself while being led by Emina.

"Do you often go to the theatre in your fief?"

"Yes. It's not an imposing building like this, but Flora does have a theatre."

"That's nice."

Then, the conversation stopped. Unfortunately, Cordelia had never seen a theatre before, so she couldn't ask any more questions about it, and searched for a new topic.

It wasn't an awkward silence, but she wanted to talk about something since she wanted to deepen their relationship.

(If possible, I would like to hear Christina-sama talk more.)

Then, the conversations would be catered to things that Christina liked.

"I was stunned when I first heard that you wanted to visit eight tailors. You must really like clothes."

"So you were surprised?"

Christina looked a little embarrassed as she put her hands to her mouth, but she happily replied, "I like them." However, her voice immediately dropped, and her voice faded, "But....."

".....Christina-sama?"

"Nothing, I'm sorry."

"Is something wrong?"

Cordelia tilted her head in curiosity and Christina shook her head.

"I forgot what I was going to say. If I remember, then I'll tell you."

Cordelia was confused at those words.

(I wonder what the heck is wrong.)

She didn't have proof, but she felt strange. This wasn't like Christina. But she was hesitant to ask since Christina had already put an end to that conversation. Even if it was something, it was useless to forcibly ask her about it if she didn't want to talk about it. Besides, they weren't close enough for Cordelia to force it out of her.

"..... Christina-sama, if it's alright with you, could you give me some advice when I don't know what dress to choose?"

Cordelia said after pondering for a while.

Christina seemed surprised by her request and then smiled.

"I would be happy to. But, your dress is very nice today, so I don't know if you would need my advice."

"Emina helped me pick this dress. She has good taste in clothing."

"Is that so? She didn't pick this dress just because she has good taste in clothing, but I think it's because she knows you very well. It really suits you."

"Thank you."

Cordelia knew that Emina was the one who was being complimented, but she became happy as if she was the one who had just been praised.

However, the person in question, Emina, stopped the conversation there.

"I'm sorry for interrupting you, but this is the store that Christina-sama wanted to visit."

Emina, who looked emotionless, spoke really fast, but it seemed to Cordelia as if her cheeks were pinkening a little. She stared at the building that Emina had pointed out to them while thinking, *I'll be happy if she's a bit embarrassed.*

"It's a lovely store."

The building had small flowers planted in the storefront, and the name was carefully engraved with elegant letters, but it didn't have an overwhelming presence like what she had felt when she had descended the carriage. Even if the building was in a corner, she felt a sort of grandeur from it that couldn't be compared to other places.

When she stepped into the store, the first thing that entered her eyes was the white theme of the store. There was a white counter and tables. On top of the tables were designs; they had sample dresses on display, and different things were elegantly arranged around the store. There was a glass wall at the back of the counter, and she saw a workshop filled with colourful fabrics.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting."

A woman appeared from the workshop when she was looking around. She seemed to be in her late twenties. She looked at Christina and spoke.

"Are you looking for a dress?"

The woman probably saw them like a lady with her younger sister and maid. Christina chuckled.

“Yes. I haven’t decided on which one yet, but I would like to see the fabric samples.”

“Okay.”

Upon Christina’s answer, the woman pulled out three thick books from under the counter. Then, she took them and walked to the table with the designs on them.

“Please take your time.”

The woman put the book down and tidied the designs. Then, she waited a short distance away.

Christina spread one of the books in front of her as if she was used to it. There were a lot of fabrics pasted in the book, and the names of the fabrics, the production areas, and characteristics were written at the bottom. It seemed like they were arranged according to type and characteristics, but there was a limit to how much Cordelia could see while standing next to Christina, who was looking at the pages earnestly. She couldn’t see very well, but she didn’t want to disturb Christina. So, she took the fabrics swatch book that Christina hadn’t opened.

The book that Cordelia had picked up had the words, 『(Reference) Interior』 written on it. When she looked inside, she saw that there were more checkered and geometric patterns in there than in the book that Christina was looking at. The materials that the fabrics were made from were different, such as, cotton, wool and hemp. The fabrics in that book might not be suitable for dresses. She also saw 『Ertiga』 written next to some of the cotton and was happy that it had a proper evaluation.

Cordelia stared at the book for a while, but another book caught her attention, and she reached for it. The only words on the front cover were 『Plain』, so it was probably for dresses. It was similar to the book that Christina was looking at.

(The hue is slightly different depending on what region the fabric came from. Sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference if you don’t compare them, but if someone was fussy, then they’d fuss over everything.)

It’s probably the same as flowers and vary depending on what environment it came from. The dying techniques and ingredients were perhaps different depending on the region.

(Christina-sama also knows a lot about these things too.)

Cordelia glanced at Christina. She looked serious as she examined the fabric and felt it with her fingers. She was also checking the texture.

Then, she moved her fingers away from the fabric and called out to the woman.

“I want to see these two.”

“Certainly!”

“Cordelia-sama, do you have any you want to look at?”

“No. If possible, I would like to look at the fabric you selected with you.”

She regretted it a little since Christina had spoken to her, but she wasn't going to buy a dress. She had a lot of dresses at home and was still growing. So, it was probably better if she studied how Christina picked her fabric since she had been that serious when looking at them. Cordelia was extremely interested in seeing what she should look out for when choosing fabrics.

The woman went into the workshop, then a middle-aged tailor came out from the back. The tailor held a smooth, lustrous fabric in his hand.

“This is the flora silk that you requested to see. It's rare, so this is the only stock we have left this season.....”

“Thanks. I'll look at it for a bit.”

Flora silk.

Cordelia was surprised when she heard those words. What is there to hide? This was the best silk in the kingdom that the Alcott House was proud of. It was called the 『Jewel Fabric』 because the colours slightly changed depending on the angle. It was only produced in Earl Alcott's fief, Flora, and was the rarest silk there. It came from an extremely rare silkworm, and couldn't be made without a skilled fabric engineer, so it was produced in a limited quantity. *As a matter of fact, this is the first time I've seen it up close.* Cordelia nearly forgot what she was thinking, because of how beautiful it was, and sighed. But at the same time, she also had some doubts.

(But why did she come to the Royal Capital to see it?)

She can get it from her fief, since she's the daughter of Earl Alcott, and the local craftsmen would know more about flora silk. Besides, if she wanted to buy a dress fashioned after the fashion here, then I think it's better for her to ask about other fabrics.....

(Is she researching the market? But, she doesn't look like she is.)

Cordelia had a question, but she couldn't ask it. Christina was looking at the silk without telling them that she was, in fact, the 『daughter of Earl Alcott』. This couldn't be said in front of the tailor. But, Cordelia realised that Christina was moving her mouth a bit without letting her voice out.

“..... That's a relief, it's real.”

Real? What the heck does that mean? Even if she thought this, Christina smiled while talking to the tailor about dresses he'd tailored in the past, so Cordelia didn't know what Christina had meant.

However, she was sure that Christina was looking for 『something』 during this outing.

Christina eagerly looked at fabrics and talked with the tailor, but she didn't purchase a dress.

“I want to think about the colour a little more.”

Christina said, but the tailor didn't look offended.

“The best thing for the dress and customer is to choose a fabric that would suit them.”

The tailor stated and told Christina that he couldn't reserve the flora silk for her, but he would do his best to get more stock for the next year. And, he also stated that he would get the silk delivered around this time if she wanted to choose a colour.

"I hope that you will find a dress that satisfies you. I would be thrilled if you can find a dress at our store."

Cordelia felt that the tailor, who had seen them off, really liked Christina. And she could understand his feelings.

(Of course, he would be happy since she was really passionate.)

Clothing and fragrances. They were different, but Christina probably felt the same about clothes as Cordelia felt about fragrances.

◆◆◆◆◆

And while they were heading towards the next store, Cordelia worried about whether she should ask Christina about what 『real』 meant, since they were walking. The second store was close to the first and didn't require a carriage to get to.

(Christina-sama probably isn't talking about it because there are people around us.)

We're not walking close to other people, but people do walk past us so our conversation may be overheard. Therefore, it still wasn't the right time to talk about this.

Cordelia concluded, and Christina asked Cordelia a question.

"What did you think about the fabric from before?"

"Are you asking about the flora silk?"

"Yes."

"It's my first time seeing it, and it's gorgeous. This might sound like a common thing to say, but I can't find any other words to express it."

It might be a simple thing to say, but Cordelia found it hard to find the right words to express the beauty of flora silk. She even thought that she might ruin the silk's charm if she picked the wrong words.

Christina grinned when she heard those words.

"We have been researching silkworms in Flora since long ago. Other fiefs are also producing silk, but I believe that flora silk is the best silk in this kingdom and in the world."

"I've also learnt that flora silk is a precious item to other kingdoms as well. In the past, a king from another kingdom was so obsessed with flora silk, that it became a bargaining chip to conclude an important treaty."

“That’s why we’re so proud of it. We’re extremely thankful for the wisdom of our predecessors, since it’s hard to grow grains in our fief, and it isn’t in an important location.”

Hearing that, Cordelia remembered the reason behind Cyrus’ and Christina’s engagement.

(So, Flora has a low food security rate.)

The value of silk was lower compared to the time when it had the power to bind a treaty, but it was still useful to Flora as its main industry. Ertiga, which is a large trading hub in Pameradia fief, could benefit from selling it; and Flora could also benefit from the abundant lands in the Pameradia fief. They could even cooperate to improve agricultural production. This engagement was worthwhile for both families.

(But I wonder how Christina-sama feels about her engagement.)

Cyrus-oniisama seemed a little concerned about Christina-sama, but how does she feel? I would be happy if her answer could dispel his fears, —— she thought and realised that she was straying away from Christina’s question.

(We’re talking about silk right now. I can’t ask her about this.)

It was too hard for her to cut the current conversation off and ask her future sister-in-law 『How do you feel about your fiancé? 』 And besides, talking about love was her weak point.

There wasn’t much difference with the buildings themselves, but the inside of the shop was crammed with dresses. The dresses were colourful, but if you looked closely, you could see that the only thing different about them was the colour. Some of the dresses had tags on them, and apparently, they were displayed in the store so that customers could buy it straight away.

(It’s a bit messy.)

The interior layout of the store wasn’t much different from the previous store, and, apart from dresses, there were tables, chairs and a counter. The wall behind the counter had a large gouged window, and the workshop was visible from the front. But, the difference was that a fit man was sitting at the counter and the workshop wasn’t very tidy.

“Oh! Ojou-samas, welcome!”

The man at the counter, who seemed to be reading a book, looked up and greeted Cordelia and Christina.

“Hello. I want to look at fabrics, do you have any samples?”

“Of course! Now, now, come, come. Sit down.”

Cordelia and Christina were quickly instructed to sit down, and when they did, the man came trotting back with some fabric samples. *We’re not in a rush, so it’s probably better if you don’t carelessly run in here.....* She thought as they both took a sample book each to look at.

(The person in the previous store looked like a tailor. I wonder if this person is just a salesperson.)

She couldn't really tell, even though that person looked more like a trader than a tailor. His voice gave off the tone of a merchant. It wasn't a good nor bad thing, but he gave off the vibes of someone on the street.

However, this store must be in demand and have a customer-base if she thought about the cost to open there. Not all nobles demanded high-end products. However, she thought that they would at least want ready-made dresses to be treated carefully.

Cordelia mimicked Christina, who had opened the fabric sample book next to her.

(The previous store didn't have any prices written down.... But this store has 『Special Price』 and 『Bargain』 written.)

She was a little surprised at how they'd emphasised that. It was certainly easier to match one's budget to something if they knew the price. Young marriageable women probably dressed up a lot when they accepted invitations from others, but the difference in their assets and those of a noble was large.

She thought that the fabric sample book was designed in a way that was easy to understand. For example, they wrote which pages one could find the same colour fabric and what the price difference was, but they didn't record which region the fabrics came from.

When she thought that they were brave for doing that, the door which connected the store to the workshop opened. From the back, a fit woman showed up with a tray of cups.

"How about taking a little break?"

The woman said in a friendly tone and gave them tea without waiting for a reply. Cordelia was surprised that the woman had served tea in a room full of dresses but thought that she had probably done that because she thought they wouldn't spill it. Of course, that was requested of them, but they shouldn't have served tea because something could happen. She wasn't planning on interfering with the store's policies, but she didn't know how to react as a person who questioned the policy.

(But it doesn't seem like they mean any harm by doing this. Instead, they're acting very friendly.)

Cordelia thought and glanced at Christina. *It's one of the stores that she wanted to visit, but what does she think of the store now?* Christina stopped moving, and her eyes were focused on a fabric sample.

『Flora Silk (Negotiable)』

Cordelia questioned the words before Christina's eyes.

(They have flora silk? In this store?)

Flora silk shouldn't exist in stores that sold cheap items. Of course, there was a chance that this store didn't specialise in selling reasonably priced fabrics.

(But, do people who can afford the flora silk come to this store?)

There were parts in this store that worried Cordelia in the short amount of time she'd been in here, and nobles probably wouldn't buy flora silk from this particular store. The dresses in there mostly looked the same, and she worried whether they could tailor a difficult material like flora silk.

“You have excellent eyes! Are you interested in flora silk, Ojou-sama?”

The male clerk accosted her and Cordelia raised her face. The smiling man looked somewhat proud. In contrast, she didn't know how to reply. She was interested in why they had this fabric in the store.

The man looked happy when Cordelia nodded, but at the same time, he also seemed troubled.

“I know you're fascinated by it because the fabric's beautiful, but kids your age don't get dresses made with this material. But, if your Onee-san wants it, then I can give her some advice.”

The man shifted his gaze to Christina.

“Me?”

“You often go out, don't you? It's expensive, but its radiance is top-rate, so you'll shine at evening parties!”

“That's right! Beautiful women should dress up beautifully!”

The woman followed suit when the man pitched the product, and the two pressured Christina. Getting the fabric pitched by a grown woman was quite troublesome.

“Then, I wonder if you could show me the fabric?”

The two smiled and went to the back when they heard Christina's answer.

“Christina-sama..... Are you sure?”

“Yes, I was a little surprised, but they're cheerful people. In any case, I was planning on seeing it anyway.”

It's not what you say, but how you say it probably refers to this, Cordelia thought. She felt that they were trying really hard to sell the silk, and if Christina wanted to look at the fabric from the start, then it was probably fine.

But, Christina seemed anxious as she waited for the flora silk to be brought out.

Not long after, the two came out from the workshop with four different coloured fabrics. The man put the fabric in front of Christina, opened it with both hands and said in a rich voice.

“What do you think of this fabric and gloss? The colour's vibrant. Don't you think it looks different from other silks?”

“All these are samples, so we can't tailor your dress straight away. It's not easy to stock since it's precious, so there are delays in delivery. But I can guarantee to sell it to you at this price if you buy it before next year.”

The woman pitched after the man and handed Christina a quote. The cost depended on the pattern, but it wasn't an astonishing sum.

“Our store doesn't get carried away with business, like the other stores. It's a bargain, isn't it? Of course, you can pay after we've gotten the fabric!”

Cordelia was reminded of the commercials she saw in her previous life, while watching the two pitch the material, and didn't feel like saying anything. The clerks who insisted that this was a bargain to the lady of the silk's production area..... It was a bizarre sight.

(They aren't getting carried away because flora silk is expensive.....)

At least there was a reason for why it was expensive. It was important silk that continued a tradition. The man and woman didn't know about Christina's lineage so they could say what they wanted. But Cordelia felt a little anxious about how it all sounded to Christina since it sounded as if they were forsaking a gem that was the pride of the area it came from.

When Cordelia glanced at her, Christina had already become expressionless. But, that was also only for a second.

"I have to ask my father. Would it be alright if I don't give you an answer right now? I want to keep this quote though....."

Cordelia hadn't expected Christina's answer and blinked. They didn't talk much after that and slipped out when another customer entered the store.

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Christina didn't say anything for a while as they walked towards the third store. She looked stiff even though she'd received the quote.

Cordelia finally opened her mouth when the store was out of sight.

"Christina-sama, the store before was a little..... weird."

Christina widened her eyes a little, but then her expression quickly softened.

"So you noticed after all."

"After all?"

"I asked Cyrus-sama about you, and he said that you were brilliant."

Cordelia had been bothered by what Cyrus could have told Christina about her since he had reminded her not to be a tomboy. Even if he had said something bad about her, Christina would change it into something nice.

"He's exaggerating."

Cordelia brushed it off so that she wouldn't say anything unnecessary. Christina continued to smile.

But, then her expression immediately changed.

"Cordelia, I have a favour to ask of you. I would like to talk to you after we're finished today. Are you free?"

Christina looked a little anxious, but it didn't seem like she was going to take back her words.

"I wanted to talk to you today, so we can talk for as long as you want."

They would probably talk about what Cordelia wanted to know during that time.

So, she wouldn't ask any unnecessary questions and enjoy shopping with Christina. However, she decided that she would keep an eye on the things she was worried about if the topic was related to the outing.

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Unfortunately, they weren't able to visit all the eight stores that Christina had wanted to see.

One of the reasons was that it took a lot of time to get to the third store, since it was far from the second store, and Christina's feet started hurting when they began walking to the fourth store.

Thus, they ended their tour at the fourth store. Afterwards, Christina purchased sweets from the tea house that Emina had recommended, and Cordelia was invited to the Alcott mansion in the Royal Capital.

"I'm sorry, even though I was the one who asked you out."

"It's fine, but is this really alright?"

"Yes. I'm a little tired because I danced too much at the ball. I usually only dance one or two songs at the fief. I have to train a little more."

Christina, who laughed, didn't look like she overdid it. The ball was the finale of the Founding Festival. Cordelia could imagine that it must have been gorgeous.

"Now then, shall we eat? They look really delicious."

"Let's eat."

The chocolate mousse from the famous confectionery store was composed of three different flavours and was very rich. The faint alcohol smell coming from it was superb.

"Oh yes..... Do you like dancing Christina-sama?"

Cordelia asked with curiosity since Christina only danced one or two songs while she was at her fief. Balls shouldn't be that short, and if she attended other events, then it probably wouldn't end at just one or two songs.

Thereupon, Christina turned a little red.

"I've been bad at dancing since young, but I don't hate dancing itself. But..... it's a bit embarrassing. We have to stay very close to our partners during such times, don't we?"

Cordelia was influenced by Christina's words and her cheeks also started to heat up.

She knew that dancing required partners to be close to each other. Therefore, she never thought anything about it when she had lessons with her tutor or when she danced with Gille before..... But she felt somewhat embarrassed when Christina put it like that.

(It wasn't like I hadn't felt shy, I'm sure I acted normal until the end. I'm sure Gille-sama thought nothing of it. So Christina-sama is actually a little shy.....!)

If someone said that I wasn't shameful enough, then I wouldn't be able to attend balls, she desperately urged. Of course, she thought that Christina's remarks were charming. And she could completely agree with Christina if she was basing it on standards in her previous life.

(But still, I don't have a problem with it in this world. Gille-sama might feel troubled if I get embarrassed about it now, and he wouldn't know why I was embarrassed. Then, I will be the only one who acts strangely.....!)

But, I feel like I'll get in over my head if I keep thinking about it. Stop, don't think. I practised really hard to dance gracefully to become a beautiful lady, even though I wasn't good at it. I have to avoid not being able to dance because I'm confusing some old memories. ——— Christina continued to act embarrassed while Cordelia was trying to shake off her feelings.

“When I first started learning how to dance, the lessons were torture. Finally, the tutor gave up on me because I was sulking. But, Cyrus-sama helped me in place of the tutor.”

“Onii-sama did?”

Cordelia widened her eyes at the sudden confession. Christina nodded and continued.

“I guess the tutor knew that I would listen to Cyrus-sama.”

“But I can't imagine you sulking.”

Also, she couldn't picture a young Cyrus accompanying Christina. They did have a painting together, but, even if she remembered that, she couldn't imagine what they would talk about.

“Fufu, I'm glad that you would say that, but I'm sorry to say that I was horrible at talking when I was younger. But Cyrus-sama wasn't appalled by that, and would always take his time to listen to me. I always looked forward to seeing him.”

“I see.”

“Oh, my bad. I want to correct something. I didn't mean to say it in the past tense, I still look forward to seeing him now.”

She spoke nostalgically and happily, and Cordelia smiled.

(Onii-sama, seems like you didn't have to worry.)

Cordelia recalled how Cyrus had acted when he worried about Christina and secretly sighed. *Looks like I don't have to worry about them, I'm sure they'll be a lovely couple.* ——— Cordelia thought for a brief second and then Christina said something Cordelia didn't even think she would say.

“That’s why I feel bad. I always think that there is someone else who is more appropriate for Cyrus-sama. If so, then I’m unworthy of him.”

Cordelia froze.

“Christina-sama?”

For an instant, she thought that she had misheard something, but she realised that she hadn’t when she saw Christina casting her eyes down.

“..... It’s well-known that Cyrus-sama is a wonderful person. So of course, I hear stories about him being a young deputy commander, about how he’s a skilled knight and about how he calmly assesses things.”

Christina slowly forced those words out of her and firmly gripped her knees.

“It’s all thanks to my ancestors that I was chosen as his partner. I’m very proud of that. But, I have nothing to be proud of. I’ve learnt all that I need to so that I wouldn’t be an embarrassment to him as his wife. But, I have nothing apart from that.”

Christina declared, and Cordelia was confused.

Cheer, console, deny her thoughts.

Such options disappeared immediately. Cordelia couldn’t say a word. She didn’t know Christina well enough. Christina wouldn’t believe her if she said that wasn’t true. Her words can’t reach Christina.

(I wonder..... if Onii-sama’s words would convince her.)

Cyrus-sama probably wouldn’t say something like that to Christina-sama. On the other hand, he probably doesn’t think like that at all; therefore he didn’t feel the need to voice his opinion on this. Cordelia thought and was at a loss for words, but Christina wasn’t looking for a reply at all.

Christina continued in a quiet and timid, yet resolved voice.

“So —— I want to at least accomplish something. I don’t know how far my power will take me..... But I want to protect our pride. I want to find out why fake flora silks are circulating around the Royal Capital.”

Act 25: Commence Investigation and Hidden Feelings

Cordelia gasped when she heard Christina's unexpected revelation.

"Fake flora silk?"

Cordelia also frowned because of Christina's grim words and expression. At the same time, she recalled that Christina had uttered, "Real," at the store.

She also remembered Christina's relief and anxiety.

(She was trying to identify if the fabric was genuine.....?)

Christina stared straight at Cordelia.

"I firmly believed this after I saw the fabric in the second store. I learnt about this because my friend at the Royal Capital, informed me that she had purchased a dress made from flora silk."

"Was your friend's dress..... a fake?"

Cordelia questioned and Christina nodded.

"She told me that she was happy to have a flora silk dress..... But, it didn't look that way to me."

That's a fake.

Christina looked disheartened, and it became apparent to Cordelia that she had visited a lot of stores to investigate them.

"Is it obvious at a glance?"

Cordelia hadn't been able to tell that it was a fake when she saw the fabric from the side. A heavy aura surrounded Christina, and she nodded.

"From what I can see, it was a completely different material. But, it's also not the typical silk that appears in the markets. They probably mixed and weaved it with flora silk."

"So half of the materials are real?"

"Yes. But those who don't know about flora silk will mistake it for the real thing. But then, I felt like there was a problem with the dying technique too. You need a special material to dye flora silk."

The words formed out of her lips slowly, as she emphasised her words, and then she continued.

"It's difficult to nurture the silkworms which make flora silk, and it requires a lot of time. The cocoon is also small and hard to handle, and we need a specific weaving machine and loom to make the silk. The dress won't be pretty if it isn't made by a skilled person. Therefore, the fabric is only sold at stores which hire people who have passed the ability test provided by the production association."

"Three stores said they dealt with flora silk today."

"Yes. The first and fourth stores are the only approved flora silk sellers in the Royal Capital. The fabric that I looked at was also genuine. But....."

Cordelia completed what Christina wanted to say in her mind. *The second store was different.*

“Fabrics have various properties, and the quality is different depending on its purpose. It’s also important to produce new fabrics which are in demand. However, it’s wrong to talk about the material as if it was rare and deceive the purchaser.”

“..... Yes, you are correct.”

“The distribution of flora silk should be under strict control. I don’t know how they’re distributing it, but as someone from the Alcott House, I must cut off the source.”

Cordelia put her hands to her mouth when she heard Christina’s decision.

“It’s troublesome, isn’t it?”

“It is.”

“The most troublesome thing is..... that even that store doesn’t realise that the fabric is fake.”

Cordelia said, and Christina nodded.

It was hard to consider that they would pitch the product so grandly if they knew it was fake. If strange rumours spread, then the other two stores would probably contact the flora silk production association. They didn’t seem to care they weren’t endorsed, judging from how they were actively pitching the product, instead of selling it in secret.

“I’m certain that the people at that store don’t know much about flora silk. Flora silk can’t be approved unless it meets a certain standard, so there’s no way the price could drop a lot..... They didn’t seem to question that at all.”

Christina’s complicated feelings, which showed in her voice, revealed that she actively wanted to solve this case, and it also showed her quiet rage towards the fakes. She might also have been angry at the clerks from the second store because they didn’t realise it was a fake, and stressed only on how cheap it was, without knowing what the fabric really was.

(They also said they were proud of it.)

Even though Cordelia thought that, she didn’t dare ask Christina about it since she was trying to calm down. There was one thing they had to do first.

“I have to look into that store.”

“You do.”

If they didn’t realise that it was a fake, then the supplier was the culprit. But, they might be deceived if they were careless..... At any rate, they had to quickly investigate the store first. In any case, the only thing they knew was that the shop sold fakes.

However, it was necessary to confirm something before they started their investigation.

“What does Earl Alcott think about this?”

Cordelia didn't want to choose the option of not helping since she had heard so much. However, she probably wasn't permitted to stick her nose into another Houses' business.

"I have also told Otou-sama about the possibility of fakes being sold. But, he can't act with just my friend's words. So, he left the investigations to me. I have to report to him, but he's leaving the investigation method to me."

I see. The Earl would definitely stick out if he investigated based on what little information he has, and it might become more serious than it actually is if he gets involved. There shouldn't be anyone who wants to collect too many speculations.

(If it's Christina-sama, then it wouldn't be strange for a lady to want dresses.)

Christina had spoken a lot about this, so she wouldn't refuse Cordelia's involvement.

"The stores are also a problem, but we have to stop the source."

Cordelia fired, since she had decided that she would help.

The production association didn't control the whole process, even if they supplied the stores with silk. Cordelia's speculation was spot-on.

"The silkworms that make flora silk should be strictly managed by the association. We are planning to investigate them in private, but we would probably face serious difficulties because of their pride."

"Certainly..... The association would be humiliated by the replicas, but individuals will become hostile if you don't trust the job they're doing, so you will need time to deal with that."

If the association managed the materials strictly, then there should be a considerable amount of data, but it would be different if they needed to verify information, in the case that someone falsified it. *Did they lie about the number of cocoons or did they lie about the silkworms themselves.....?* Cordelia could think of a couple of possibilities just from briefly thinking about it. She had no material to conclude her hypothesis with, so they needed to inspect the possibilities.

(At least, this will go nowhere if we don't get our hands on that fake silk.)

Cordelia thought, and Christina apologised somewhat.

"I'm sorry."

"Excuse me?"

"I know that you're a brilliant person..... But, I wished that you were around my age."

Cordelia's eyes widened in surprise at the sudden confession.

She didn't care what age people thought she was, but she felt that Christina didn't think of her as much of a child.

"So then, why did you tell me all this? If you think of me as young, then you would be worried that I might blurt it out, right?"

There was a possibility that Christina had 『accidentally』 blurted it out to Cordelia, if she thought of Cordelia as someone who acted her age. Cordelia couldn't help but think that it was too careless of Christina, if that were true. However, Christina chuckled at Cordelia's question.

“I didn't think about that. It would probably be undesirable for the Pameradia House if the price of silk in Flora drops. I can't say that Cyrus-sama is very smart, since he didn't think of that.”

I see, she presented herself as quiet until today, but she does have the abilities of a merchant. Cordelia was strangely relieved when she thought that.

That's good. But that didn't mean that she was like a kind saint.

“I've asked you something very rude. But, let me correct something. I am certainly a child. I'm glad that I have your recognition, but it's easier to be a child.”

Cordelia said mischievously, and Christina smiled wryly. However, she had something she wanted to tell Christina.

“Please use me. I will do my best to be useful to you. You told me this much because you wanted me to help you, isn't that right?”

Although Cordelia had intended to help, she hadn't conveyed that to Christina. “Please do.” Cordelia smiled.

“..... I'm sorry for being a horrible adult.”

“I'm rather happy to help. Christina-sama..... Sister-in-law, we're going to be family soon.”

Christina looked a little depressed, and her cheeks flushed a little. Cordelia hadn't intended to tease her, but her reaction was also charming.

She was delighted that this person would become her sister-in-law. Of course, Christina's innocent reactions weren't the only reason for that.

“I'm delighted to know that you value flora silk so much.”

“Huh?”

“Even if you're really familiar with the material, you were able to conclude whether it was real or fake within seconds. You must really love flora silk a lot.”

Christina's eyes flashed but slowly softened.

“I do. I love flora silk and many other fabrics too. I also like tailored clothes, because I think that clothes have the same power as words.”

“Could you tell me more?”

“..... This is my wish. I'm not confident in myself, and I'm bad at expressing myself with words. Even so, my anxiety calms down a little when I wear dresses that make me happy and catch the attention of others with my appearance. I think that my appearance compensates for my lack of words and confidence, and it transforms my anxiety into confidence.”

Christina said, in a quiet, yet lively, voice, and Cordelia smiled.

Christina's calm and vivid expressions contained a firm and strong will. *I'm sure this is how passionate she is about her clothes.*

"Of course, I need to practice how to talk adequately. To the extreme, clothes are just fabric. However, people can change their impressions and expressions depending on the colour, shape and fabric of their clothes. I think clothes are a way to express yourself."

"..... Wonderful."

Christina wasn't implying that idea to only clothes, but also cosmetics and aromas, which Cordelia liked. What kind of decorations one wore did not directly relate to how comfortable their life was. Still, many people incorporated their own preferences into their outfits at home and on social occasions. Surely, that was because they gain confidence by approaching their ideal image, and therefore, had more leeway.

"Some people insist that you dress up to attract the opposite sex. Of course, I don't think that's completely wrong. However, I think that we also dress up because we want to be recognised by other people..... Cordelia-sama?"

"Oh, sorry. I was fascinated by you because you look so lovely when you're talking so passionately about your ideas."

Cordelia replied while smiling when Christina tilted her head in curiosity. Cordelia also thought, *do you also think about what appearance you want to show Onii-sama?* But she didn't say it. She would interrupt Christina if she did.

Cordelia tore herself away from her strayed thoughts and lightly coughed.

"But if you think like that, then you must solve this problem now."

"Yes..... My friend is very pleased with the dress, but she would be sad if she found out that it's a fake."

'I want to protect flora silk. I want to find the truth behind the dress which deceived my friend.'

Cordelia sorted Christina's wishes and then slowly spoke.

"Then, sister-in-law. How would you like me to help you?"

"Thank you very much. Then, could you go to the stores with me tomorrow? I think that having someone younger with me, such as Cordelia, would make them drop their guards."

"Of course, I would love to."

"Apparently the other stores don't stock flora silk. So, we're just going there to confirm that. I will be ecstatic if they don't have any fakes."

Christina looked as if she had mixed feelings.

(..... If they don't then that's fine, but we still have to be suspicious of them. This is probably hard on her.)

She had to investigate them, even if she didn't doubt them. This might be hurting Christina's conscience.

(But still, it's something she thinks she has to do.)

She's really gentle and strong, Cordelia thought.

"Then, sister-in-law. Let's do our best to prove that the stores which aren't involved in this really aren't involved."

Cordelia said, in the most cheerful and lightest voice she could.

I will clear the suspicions that I created on my own..... I think that's really rude to the store. However, it was challenging to declare that something that didn't exist wasn't there. It was much easier to point something out.

(Finally, we won't have proof unless we expose the mastermind and clarify the matter. But, she needed to make that decision to get evidence.)

Christina's expression softened a little when she heard what Cordelia said. "Okay," she replied.

Then, Cordelia suddenly heard the birds chirping. She looked outside and saw that it was getting a little dark out.

"..... I better get going soon. I have to let Otou-sama and Onii-sama know that I will be going out tomorrow. We'll pick you up tomorrow."

"Thank you very much."

After that, Christina walked them to the front gate. Cordelia gave her thanks and boarded the carriage with Emina.

Then, as she was about to leave, she told Christina what she'd forgotten to say.

"This may sound silly, but I'm thrilled that I could talk to you like this."

"Huh?"

"About the silk and clothes. I've never seen you shine as bright as you did today when you spoke about those things."

"I, I didn't mean-....."

Christina looked a little embarrassed, and Cordelia repeated her farewells, then the carriage slowly started to run.

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Cordelia thought quietly while looking out the carriage.

(She requested that I accompany her tomorrow. But, going around aimlessly is a waste of time.)

I've decided to help her, so I can't get in her way. But the Royal Capital is an essential plot of land to us, so it's impossible for me to overlook evil deeds.

(I wonder if I can get my hands on some fake flora silk. I might be able to find out where it's being produced.)

Silkworms mainly eat mulberry leaves, so they should also have absorbed the magic from the land. That magic is also passed onto the thread, and it should be possible to trace it back to the producing area. Luckily, Cordelia had never heard about any artificial feeds. Unfortunately, the Alcott House wasn't permitted to hire magicians who had graduated from the Magic Academy, so they would need to put in a request to an appropriate institution if they wanted further analysis.

(..... If so, then this situation would get out of hand.)

If I can get my hands on the imitations, then I should be able to get them analysed at the Pameradia House.

Cordelia thought, as she turned to face Emina and asked.

“Say, Emina. Do you think you could buy some of that fake fabric?”

“Buy the fake fabric, you say?”

“Yes. If I get a dress made, then it'll take a lot of time, right?”

“..... In a normal situation, it would be. They aren't wholesalers, so I don't think they've thought about selling the fabric on it's own.”

Emina answered unsavoury, and Cordelia raised the edge of her mouth.

“Yes, 『in a normal situation』 correct?”

Emina nodded.

“I don't want to say this, but I think the people from today would sell it for the right price. Whether or not it's good or bad, they seem to have a very flexible mood.”

“Then, let's go back to the store. Can you get them to hand over some? And I wonder if this is enough money for it?”

Emina nodded at the amount Cordelia had on hand. It was a considerable amount of money to Cordelia, but Emina concluded that it would be enough.

“I don't mind if they give us scraps. If they ask you for a reason, then would this do, 『the selfish younger sister wants some, even if they're just scraps』 ? It's fine if you tell them another reason, but tell me later so we can match our stories.”

“Understood.”

Cordelia obtained a small piece of cloth as a result of going back to the store. The piece of fabric wasn't big enough to make a handkerchief. She thought that it was unreasonable to receive this little piece of cloth for that amount of money, but there was nothing she could do.

(If I think of this cloth as a piece of information, then it's cheap.)

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Cordelia returned to the mansion and called for Ronnie straight away.

Ronnie was delighted that she had called for him.

"Welcome back, Ojou-sama. Is that a present for me?"

"Yes. It's a very important present."

"..... Important, present?"

Ronnie got a bad feeling and tried to pull his hand back, but Cordelia put the cloth into his hand before he could.

"For you."

Ronnie's face twitched when he saw Cordelia grin.

"..... What is this? I was expecting some food."

"My bad, this is cloth you can't eat. It's your job."

"Waaaaaah! I was looking forward to this because I heard you went to a nice confectionery store!"

"I don't want this!" Ronnie seemed to say, and Cordelia desperately tried to stop herself from bursting into laughter. It was a sincere reaction.

"Let's see, if you finish it, then I'll buy some delicious sweets."

Cordelia smiled wryly. She didn't think about buying gifts, because she had only gone out to town, but one might expect a gift if she called for them straight away. Other servants probably wouldn't, but this was Ronnie. It wasn't strange that he interpreted her actions in that way.

"Oh, Ojou-sama..... Okay, I'll do it."

"Ronnie, this is your work."

Emina immediately put Ronnie back in his place because he was sulking. But, Ronnie always acted like that, so it wasn't very effective. If Ronnie listened to people, then it wouldn't be strange for him to have corrected his attitude long ago.

"Ronnie, I want you to trace where the fabric was made. I don't mind if you just tell me where the raw materials come from."

“Eh? Oh, this is silk. Well, I don’t think I can’t do it.”

Ronnie looked at the fabric and felt it with his fingertips.

“Master has a book on geology, so it’s possible for me to find it out if I analysis what the silkworms eat. Well, I can’t say that I will succeed.”

Nevertheless, Cordelia was relieved since Ronnie looked confident. *I knew he could do it. I’ll give him a lot of sweets once he’s finished with the analysis.*

“But, I have a bad feeling about this.”

Ronnie muttered seriously before Cordelia could secretly make her decision, and she frowned.

“What do you mean?”

Did Ronnie find something disturbing just by glancing at it? Did he sense something about it, even though I never told him it’s a fake?

But, Cordelia was surprised by Ronnie’s answer.

“My instincts are telling me that you’re involved in something complicated, since this job is different from the ones you usually tell me to do.”

“.....”

Is that something you say to your Ojou-sama? Cordelia thought and shrugged. She also admitted that he wasn’t necessarily wrong this time.

“But well, I’ve had a good holiday, so this is a good warmup.”

She said, “I’m counting on you,” to Ronnie who had said it was complicated but also a warmup, and returned to her room.

Cordelia changed her clothes and sat down on the sofa after Emina left her room. Then, she opened the small can containing her aroma stone, which was nearby, and the smell of lavender and chamomile drifted in the air.

She hadn’t made any significant progress, but she felt calm in her room. She was a little tired from her outing and slowly closed her eyes.

“How wide is the thread producing area.....? That’s a problem, but I also don’t know why they’re running the scam.”

It would be simple if they were only doing it to make money. But I feel like the tactics they’re employing are just too messy.

(The thing I’m most concern about is how vigorous they’re selling the product; it’s as if they don’t care if they get caught.)

If my hypothesis is correct, then the mastermind is selling the fabric, but I don't understand what they're trying to do. They probably wouldn't use such conspicuous methods if they aim to earn money by selling the counterfeit. They should be able to conclude that it is a big risk.

“What the heck are they trying to do?”

Cordelia pondered as she placed her hands over her mouth. *I can't cast aside the possibility that they really thought that they wouldn't get caught, but it's hard to imagine that they would think like that.*

“But, speaking of crude methods..... It was favourable for me, but Lara's case was also the same.”

There were a lot of odd things about when Lara came here as 『Carla』. Assuming that she could enter an Earl's mansion, it wouldn't be strange if the guards had stopped her from forcibly entering if she caused a commotion.

(In Lara's case, it's possible that they knew that I'm an eccentric. They may have also considered that I would sympathise with a child who had nowhere to go and it's also possible that they didn't care if Lara failed or not.)

After that, I heard that the Dark Guild that Lara was in was wiped out. But, I also heard that they were only at the bottom of the ladder. The top brass had done a great job at cutting them loose, and it was impossible to find any trace of them.

However, according to Ronnie, “The top brass didn't do a good job, they were just too stupid to realise that they were being used.” Isma had also said, at the same time, “All the information that the group knows about the top brass was fake.” Apparently, that group wasn't trusted by their comrades either. In any case, they couldn't chase after the criminal group since they didn't know what connections the group had. The only thing they could do was drive the group into a corner. There were a lot of things about the group that worried them, but they couldn't find any clues on the group since they hadn't caused any real harm.

“..... I hope that I'm overthinking the connection between these incidents.”

Bad expectations tend to attract bad results. I need to make the worst assumption, but I should connect them. So, let's stop thinking.

Cordelia changed her mind and rewound her thoughts a little.

(What's their goal?)

TICK TICK She listened to the sounds of the clock as she thought in silence.

How much time has passed? Cordelia fell asleep somewhere along the lines and was woken up by a knock at her door.

The person who was in the corridor was a sleepy Ronnie.

“I'm finished, Ojou-sama.”

“..... I'm shocked. That was really fast.”

Even though some time had passed, it shouldn't have been enough for him to finish. However, Ronnie carelessly declared.

"It doesn't matter if I was quick..... Both the warp and the weft are made in Flora. It's the most famous silk production area, so I compared it with the data there first, and it was a hit."

I thought he was going to say something more complicated, well that was anticlimactic. Cordelia widened her eyes in surprise.

"Did you notice anything else?"

"Hmm..... Are you asking if the weft is made from flora silk? I can't conclude this since I haven't seen the real thing. But the characteristics match."

"Do you not sell them at Eris firm?"

"Of course not. You know, we can't be the middleman because only stores acknowledged by the production association can sell them."

Come to think of it, that's true. But Ronnie still looked dubious.

"It seems like there's still something you don't understand."

"Yes..... Well, why did they make this kind of cloth? Ojou-sama, where did you get this from?"

"I can't tell you where I got it from, but what do you mean by 『this cloth』? Is it because it's mixed?"

Cordelia asked, and Ronnie groaned.

"No, I don't care if it's mixed..... The cloth has a sheen to it, but it's also inconsistent. The person who made this is probably inexperienced. They might be able to hide this well if they tailor it into a dress, but they could do this with normal silk instead of going out of their way to make this mixed weave. This is an inferior product, and I wouldn't buy something like this."

Ronnie didn't have any business skills because he was too honest, not because he didn't have a discerning eye.

"Thanks. You've been very helpful."

Cordelia said, and Ronnie laughed.

"Not at all. I feel like I've done something bad because I thought I would get delicious sweets if I finished this."

"Oh my, should I decrease the amount to lessen your guilt?"

"Eeeh!?"

It was funny to see Ronnie get surprised when Cordelia was just teasing him, so she laughed.

"Sorry, I'm just joking. But I feel bad for Lara if I just get something for you, so I'll properly prepare something for the both of you. I'm going out tomorrow as well, so I'll buy you both something then."

"..... I'm looking forward to it, you know?"

Ronnie smiled wryly while still being a bit dubious, and Cordelia responded lightly, “I know.”

“Ah, one more thing. Ojou-sama, dinner’s ready.”

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

Cordelia placed the cloth on the table in her room and headed towards the dining room. Ronnie accompanied her halfway there, since he was heading to the library. Cordelia muttered as she watched Ronnie walk, “Ronnie, you’re really amazing.”

“Huh, why so suddenly?”

“You’re not an expert on silk, but you know a lot about it.”

Ronnie said it was easy even with analysis magic, but he finished it too quickly. And if he so desired, then he could easily succeed in the army..... No, she thought he could become an extraordinary magician. However, the biggest factor that prevented him from doing so was his lack of motivation.

(But if he’s too serious then he’ll lose the charm of being Ronnie.)

However, Ronnie got flustered because he didn’t know why she had complimented him so suddenly.

“Stop it, Ojou-sama. I’m flattered, but I haven’t done anything.”

“I’m only saying what I think?”

“But I still feel like I’m being flattered!”

Ronnie wasn’t bashful, and his face was becoming pale. Cordelia’s face twitched as she said, “Are you not happy about it?” Well, she wouldn’t know how to react if he’d turned red either, but she wanted to say, ‘You don’t have to be that surprised’. It wasn’t like she had said something horrible, nor had she threatened him.

(Well, he might be thinking that I’ll be giving him more work.....)

She thought and confirmed the details with him to switch the topic.

“That silk is definitely from Flora, right?”

“Yes, definitely. It’s difficult to grow mulberries, the further away you are from the centre. It takes too much effort and money to move the feed to another place.”

“That’s true.”

If they did move the feed, then it won’t be fresh anymore. Then, the magic will also drop and probably won’t remain in the silkworm and silk.

(But cloth didn’t need magic, and a crude smuggler wouldn’t care about such things.)

Ronnie frowned and stopped Cordelia from thinking in silence with a single word, “Ojou-sama.”

“Don’t get too involved in this. They can’t be good if they’re making such a product for money.”

Ronnie said, as if he was spitting out the words, and Cordelia agreed with him, “You’re right.” That was indeed true, even if she didn’t know what their goal was.

“But we can’t just ignore it if it becomes a problem, right?”

A long sigh escaped from Ronnie when he heard Cordelia’s reply. His prediction of this being 『troublesome』 was spot on.

“..... Please report this to the Master. Don’t get hurt, and use me if you need me.”

“Thanks.”

“No. My future is frightening if you get hurt, so I want to avoid that. But, tell me beforehand.”

His words were mixed with humour, but those were probably his true feelings. He’s always so reliable.

“I will. I’ll be careful not to get hurt.”

I shouldn’t get hurt, but if I did come across such a situation, then Christina-sama will get hurt too. I don’t think I’ll encounter such a situation in town, but I don’t know what will happen.

Act 26: Proposal to Brother; Brother's Warning

After dinner, Cordelia asked Hans to tell her when Elvis came home, but Hans shook his head.

“Unfortunately, Master will not return today. But, Cyrus-sama will be back home today.”

“I see. Then will you tell me when Onii-sama is back?”

“Certainly.”

It was rare for Elvis to have urgent business and not come home. Instead, Cyrus would probably come back late.

(It'll be nice if he comes back early so we can talk.)

But when she thought that, Emina rushed to Hans.

“Cyrus-sama has returned. He isn't in any rush, but dinner preparations are being made.”

Emina said something that no one could have guessed from her flustered appearance.

“Onii-sama is already back?”

“Yes, he's in his room.”

There's still time before dinner's ready. Cordelia concluded and informed Hans and Emina that she would be heading to Cyrus's room.

If I have something to tell him, then I should do it sooner. It's best to tell him while he has spare time.

“Onii-sama, can I come in?”

When Cordelia got to Cyrus's room, she knocked and informed him that she was there, and he replied briefly, “It's open.” She opened the door and stepped inside.

Cyrus's room was simple. Elvis's room was simple too, and it didn't feel like it was lived in. They looked like showrooms since they didn't actually spend much time in their rooms.

Cyrus sat on a simple sofa at the corner of the room and put the book that he was reading on his knee before Cordelia entered.

The book was well made, but there didn't seem to be a title. *What book is he reading?* Cordelia wondered, but she was cut off by Cyrus before she could ask him about it.

“Do you want to talk about your outing?”

“Yes.”

However, she was a little lost. *Onii-sama works for the kingdom. Is it alright for me to tell him about the fake fabric?*

(If Onii-sama knows about possible crimes in the Royal Capital, then he might be forced to investigate it.)

Christina would be at a disadvantage, since she wanted to catch up to the status quo. She was at a loss for words, but he might come to a strange conclusion if she stayed quiet for too long.

“We visited four tailors today, and I also visited the Alcott mansion.”

“I see.”

“She invited me out tomorrow too, is that alright?”

“It’s fine if you’re not bothering her. I’ll tell father.”

“Th-thank you very much.”

Cordelia panicked a little since he had easily given his permission.

(..... But is it really alright since I will be poking my nose into a troublesome matter.)

She wasn’t doing anything bad, but she felt a bit guilty.

Of course, Cyrus might already know about this, —— and she regretted a little that she hadn’t asked Christina if he knew.

(Still, I won’t talk to him about it.)

Then, I have to be careful to not do anything that would be a disadvantage for the Pameradia House. Luckily, tomorrow is only an outing. I can talk to him later after I’ve confirmed things with Christina-sama.

But, I want us to share information if he does know about it. It should be fine for me to question him a little.

“I talked a lot about clothes with sister-in-law.”

“I see.”

“Do you also talk to her about clothes?”

“I’m not familiar with women’s clothes.”

“..... Of course, you’re not.”

Cyrus showed no reaction when she called Christina 『sister-in-law』 for the first time in front of him, nor when she talked about clothes. She hadn’t intended to limit the conversation to women’s clothes, but she didn’t dare ask any further since he’d countered with a serious look.

But, does this mean that Christina-sama didn’t tell him anything at all, since he’s not giving off any particular reaction to the topic?

But when she thought that, she noticed that she’d overlooked something.

(Onii-sama is not a man of many words..... I wonder if he just says too little.)

For example, Cyrus hadn’t asked her anything when she asked him for permission to go out tomorrow. Even if he had no reason to refuse his fiancée’s invitation, he should at least ask her what they would

be doing. However, he hadn't done that and continued to reply as if he was trying to stop her from talking.

(It's like he's trying to stop me from saying anything else.)

Is he telling me not to say anything unnecessary? When she unexpectedly came up with that idea, Cyrus suddenly asked her a question.

"..... Are you curious about this book?"

"Huh? Oh, yes."

She had unconsciously lowered her gaze onto Cyrus' knee, where the book with no title was located.

Even though Cordelia had been confused by his sudden question, she had still replied with yes. Of course, she wasn't really curious about the book, but she couldn't tell him why she was absent-minded.

"It's a diary."

"So Onii-sama also keeps a diary?"

Of course, that didn't mean that diaries didn't suit Cyrus, but she couldn't imagine him writing in one. She thought that seeing Cyrus writing in a diary would be as pretty as a picture, but she couldn't imagine what kind of expression he would make while writing in one. *Would Onii-sama write lengthy sentences even though he's a man of few words?*

But, Cyrus continued speaking without regard for Cordelia.

"I was told to write one when I was little, to practice writing. But, I stopped writing in it when I became a knight."

"Is there a reason why you stopped?"

"It's only because my lifestyle changed. It was like the only thing I did was sleep, so I stopped writing in the diary."

Apparently, the life of a rookie knight was also hard for someone like Cyrus. But that meant that this diary was with him until he was 15. The memories of his childhood before that were all written in that book.

"....."

"....."

"..... I won't show you."

"..... Too bad."

She knew that the possibility of him showing her was very low, since she wouldn't show anyone her diary. But she was a little disappointed since, in the corner of her mind, she thought he would show her.

But, Cyrus's remark had been surprising. They could have kept a conversation going even if he hadn't brought that up, but the appearance of him purposely refusing was somewhat childish. He really didn't want to show her, but it was endearing to see him act like that.

“But why are you reading your diary?”

“I was suddenly curious..... about how I thought as a child.”

Cyrus replied in a bland tone.

(It's Onii-sama, so he was probably mature since back then.)

Cyrus raced up the promotional ladder and became the Deputy Commander of the 1st Imperial Guard unit. *It's hard to imagine him writing something childish in his diary.* When she thought that, she became extremely curious about the diary.

But, she didn't say that out loud, since it didn't seem like Cyrus missed his childhood.

Cyrus muttered regardless of whether he knew what Cordelia was thinking.

“I thought that my ideas have always remained the same, but now that I've read back on it, it's not exactly the same. I still have the same ideas from when I was a child, but I've also forgotten some things.”

Are those words directed at himself or me.....? Cordelia didn't know. But she could tell that he probably obtained something from reading his diary.

The current Onii-sama fully understands the younger Onii-sama. It's a little strange.

“At any rate..... So, you also have things you forget, Onii-sama.”

“What do you think I am?”

Cyrus protested to Cordelia, who had spoken in a strange voice. Cordelia glossed it over and laughed, “Of course, I think that you're my Onii-sama.” However, Cyrus didn't seem interested in that topic and threw his next question at her.

“You also keep a diary, don't you?”

“Yes, I do.”

Her diary was a mixture of her life and experiments..... Though she did write more about her experiments, she did write about what happened in her life.

“It's better to write what you think. It'll definitely be useful later.”

“I will. It's so I don't forget my original intentions, right?”

Even for everyday events, except for those that really stand out, once every 10 days..... No, once a day she would think, “Oh, that happened.” And like Cyrus had said, there would be things that she would forget about. Like Cyrus, she might be able to fully understand something in the future.

However, she suddenly thought of something.

(If Onii-sama writes more than he talks then-.....)

Cordelia thought. She prepared herself and proposed to her brother.

“Onii-sama, there's something I wish to ask you. Would you please write a letter to sister-in-law?”

“A letter?”

“Yes. You don’t have much time to talk to her. I will give it to her tomorrow, and you’ll have more to talk about the next time you meet. I feel bad for monopolising sister-in-law’s time.”

Cyrus pondered for a while.

“..... I haven’t written to her much.”

“Then you should write to her more.”

Even if they weren’t having a direct conversation, Cyrus’s worries would decrease if they talked more, and Christina would be able to understand how he feels. But she wanted something that would give more impact if she wanted them to deepen their relationship.

“Please write your letter onto a blank diary.”

“..... Write a letter in a diary?”

“Yes. And then Christina-sama will reply to your letter in that diary. It is called exchanging diaries.”

“Exchanging..... diaries?”

‘Why are you saying something strange?’ Cyrus’s expression seemed to say, and Cordelia faced him with an earnest look on her face.

Cyrus’s reaction was normal. There was no such custom in this kingdom. Even Cordelia hadn’t experienced it in her previous life. She had only seen it in manga, anime and novels.

But, she knew what it involved. An exchange diary was something shared between two people, and they wrote what they wanted to tell each other into the diary.

“But there are advantages to this which you won’t be able to get with a letter. For example, if you send a letter then you won’t have it anymore, right? But if you exchange diaries, then you’ll be able to see all the replies in the diary.”

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with sending a letter.”

“Of course, there’s nothing wrong with it if you were just communicating. But..... for example, don’t you think it would be better to see the message history if you were consulting on something like dates? And, as you said before, you could read back on the texts if you’ve forgotten about it.”

Cordelia chose her words a bit playfully. Diaries are written truthfully so that one could read back on what they wrote. It is easier for one to write their true feelings by doing it that way. And it was highly likely for two people to deepen their shared thoughts because they were both writing in it.

In her previous life, exchanging diaries was a childish thing to do, but this world didn’t have the concept, so she didn’t have to worry about that.

But, it didn’t seem like Cyrus understood her erratic words.

(..... *Have I not said enough?*)

Just one more push. He hadn't rejected the idea so it would be a loss if I hold back. But I can't rush this. She thought, and faced Cyrus seriously.

"Report, communication, discussion. Exchanging diaries is useful for writing these things and for looking back on what you've written."

"That might be true....."

"Of course the format is different, but I'll tell sister-in-law about my unreasonable request. So, won't you write in it?"

"....."

Cyrus remained silent. After a while, however, he stood up as he sighed and took a book from the sleeve of a big table. Then, he returned to where Cordelia was and gave it to her.

She received the book, stared at the deep crimson cover and looked inside. It was a brand new diary.

"Is this fine?"

"Yes."

Cordelia grinned because it seemed like he had agreed to it.

"I don't mind writing in one, but don't force Christina to do it."

"Of course I won't."

"I can't write about important things."

"That's fine."

"Honestly..... Who the heck do you take after?"

Cordelia expressed her gratitude with a smile at Cyrus, who had given in, "Thank you." Then, she gave the diary back to him.

"I'll give you what I write tomorrow."

"Okay."

Cordelia stood up. Cyrus's dinner should be ready by now.

"Onii-sama, please let me know when you have time to meet up with Christina-sama. I won't get in your way. Of course, I don't mind joining in if I get invited."

"Okay."

"You'll make time to meet her, won't you?"

"..... Yeah."

"You'll tell me once you know your schedule, won't you?"

"..... Yeah."

I don't know if he would do it from his reply. But, he'll probably try since he's responding to me. She thought, and felt a bit lighter.

"Then, Onii-sama. I'll excuse myself."

She felt bad for disturbing him for so long and turned around to go back to her room.

"Cordelia."

However, Cyrus stopped her as she was about to put her hand on the door and she turned around.

"Yes?"

"Don't pursue it too far."

"Excuse me?"

"That's all. You can go back to your room."

Cyrus's tone was low and sharp, completely different from before. He didn't indicate what he was warning her about, but it wasn't like she couldn't guess.

(Brother is supposed to be 『ignorant』 of this.)

I don't know how much he knows. Does he not want to tell me or can he not tell me?

(..... If he's not ordering me to stop, then I'll make him let me do what I can.)

Cordelia interpreted his warning and smiled.

"I'll be with sister-in-law. I will learn how to act like a lady."

Cyrus still looked blank. However, she felt that he was a bit shocked by her words. His expression made her recall his previous words, "Who do you take after?" But it all made her laugh.

She couldn't answer that anyway. Cordelia didn't know who she took after. She was definitely influenced by all the people she admired, so it was hard to tell who she took after.

Act 27: Happy Breakfast

When Cordelia woke up the next morning, she immediately changed her clothes and went to the dining room.

“Good morning, Onii-sama.”

“Mm.”

Cyrus was already in the living room. He was reading a newspaper over a cup of tea.

The newspaper in this world didn’t have any illustrations or photographs, and, if there were no titles, then it would look like a dictionary because it was packed full of words. Therefore, there weren’t many pages. It wasn’t as common as in her previous life, but ordinary families could read newspapers too if they had extra income.

Cordelia usually read the newspaper after Elvis was done with it. Recently, most of the articles had been about the Founding Festival. Where important people could be seen, the Royal Family’s speeches..... It was filled with political articles and articles about eating contests. Several days had already passed since the Founding Festival, but they were still writing about it.

(A lot of things happened during the Founding Festival, and it was so peaceful because no big incidents happened.)

That’s good. But if Onii-sama is reading about the eating contests..... No, there’s no way he’s reading that.

(Onii-sama really looks like Otou-sama.)

They were about 20 years apart in age, but their presences were imposing. She wondered if it was because he was a deputy commander.

(Now I really want to see Otou-sama in a knight uniform.)

He’ll probably suit it if he wears it now. Well, I don’t think he would wear it just because I imagined it.

Her food came straight away when she sat down.

Today’s breakfast was the galette and salad that she had ordered yesterday. The galette was made with mushroom, asparagus, cheese, bacon and a soft-boiled egg. She also enjoyed the chalky texture of the buckwheat flour. Apparently, people didn’t eat it often in the Royal Capital, but she had it for breakfast once every few days. Cyrus saw her at the corner of his eyes and looked up from the newspaper.

“..... Is that a dish from the seaside city?”

“Yes. I found out about buckwheat flour while procuring herbs, so I also obtained the cooking method. They eat this dish in a more simple way where it’s from. Do you know about this dish Onii-sama?”

“I’ve been there on a mission, but I’ve never had that before.”

“Would you also like to have some, Onii-sama?”

He probably didn't have any time to roam freely, since he went there on a mission.

If you're interested in it, then you should eat it. Of course, I didn't make this myself, but I'm the only one who eats it right now. If I don't ask him, then Onii-sama will probably have his usual breakfast.

However, Cyrus shook his head lightly.

“No, I'll eat that on my day off.”

Cordelia was surprised by his answer.

He probably has training today. His job requires a lot of stamina. He probably needs food that will fill him up.

After a while, food was carried out to Cyrus, who had finished reading his newspaper. His breakfast seemed to be twice as much as Cordelia's. He had a mountain of salad, bread, meat and fish..... Cyrus ate his food calmly and neatly.

(..... With this amount, it probably doesn't matter if it's filling or not.)

She ate with him occasionally, but she always thought that he ate a lot.

“Do you like eating?”

“Huh? Yes. I'm always so thankful that the chefs cook all these delicious foods for us.”

“I see.”

“Um.”

“..... Do you have any thoughts on this too?”

Cordelia froze for a second. *I thought he was just asking his little sister what she liked, but was I wrong?* She felt a strange sense of pressure, since he was acting like he usually did.

(He resembles Otou-sama.....)

That impression popped up in the corner of her mind as she thought about how to answer.

“..... I hope that we can exchange food culture.”

“For example?”

Cordelia was a little confused by the constant questions. She hadn't planned this yet, so she couldn't explain it to him. However, she would explain it to him vaguely since she had this chance.

“For example, there's a dessert at the Pameradia fief that is similar to galette, called crepe, right? Galette isn't popular there, but what if people were to think of it like crepe, except that the dough would be made from buckwheat and the stuffing is meat and vegetables?”

“I guess.”

“And I would also like to sell crepes at the port. If food recipes were widely spread, then people will also become interested in the place where the food comes from, so I also want to have cultural exchanges too.”

It might take a lot of time to get people to eat foods that they weren't familiar with, but it might be easier if they were introduced to foods that were similar to theirs. If they were to become interested in the places where that food came from, then the trade routes would become more active, and it might be useful for distributing essential oils in the future..... those were her aspirations. The route already exists, but she wanted to make it busier.

“It sounds like hope more than a plan.”

“Yes. But, it's not bad.”

“It certainly isn't bad to make our fief's sweets widely known. Have you discussed this with father?”

“No, I haven't.”

“Then, you should plan the sales around the time of the Harvest Prayer Festival. It'll be easier to attract customers and get them to spend during that time. And you can also make use of our Harvest Festival.”

Cordelia listened to his advice and was happy when she realised that he concluded that the plan would be accepted by Elvis. It wasn't because she wasn't confident, but getting positive feedback gave her confidence a boost.

“There's something else I want to ask you.”

“What is it?”

“The exchange diary that you were talking about yesterday..... did you get this strange idea because you're exchanging one with someone?”

She tilted her head.

“No, I'm not.”

“I see.”

But contrasted with his words, he didn't look convinced. *Is it strange that I'm recommending it to someone when I don't do it myself?* She thought as she replied again, “Mm.”

“It seems like you often write letters, so I thought you did something like this too.”

“Eh?”

“You don't?”

“N-no. I do.....”

She certainly did write letters. But she had never written them in front of Cyrus, she had always given them directly to Vernoux. *Why does he know about this?* Her thoughts had been transmitted to Cyrus.

“You would occasionally ask for stationery, don't you? It's not like I used it as a chance, but I asked Hans if he could purchase some for me too.”

“I, I see.”

It was leaked from an unexpected person.

But, there's no way he would know who I'm writing to just because of that. She was relieved and timidly asked Cyrus.

“Does Otou-sama know?”

“He shouldn't since you didn't tell him. Father always uses the same paper, so it gets refilled without him having to do anything.”

Cordelia patted her chest. *Thank god.*

I needed more stationery recently because I'm also writing to Hazel-sama now, as well as Gille-sama, but did he know about this since long ago, since he said he noticed when he purchased stationery? He probably didn't, since he didn't say anything about it, but this is an unexpected trap.

(No, I don't have to be embarrassed about anything..... It's normal to send letters to people.)

Still, it feels embarrassing to say it for some reason. It's impossible for me to explain this since I only know Gille-sama as Vernoux-sama's friend. I don't want to say anything because of that. What the heck is this?

(This is..... Yes, this is the fear of being misunderstood. If I tell him that I've been exchanging letters with Gille-sama for four years, then Onii-sama might think that I'm in love with Gille-sama.)

He might misunderstand something if I tell him that Gille-sama is a good friend. She felt extremely embarrassed when she thought that.

No, it's not like that. I'm sure Gille-sama wouldn't wish for that. When she thought that, she became even more embarrassed and was apologetic towards Gille. *I'm sorry for thinking something weird.*

(I guess..... I don't have any resistance when it comes to my own love life.)

She tried desperately to stop herself from going red, and her expression was surely puzzling. She wanted to experience love in the future, but she became very uneasy about whether she could find love by doing that. She hoped to meet a lover who lived peacefully. ——— But, her first priority was to control her hot flashes.

“..... There's nothing for you to panic about.”

Cyrus had apparently seen her different behaviours, and Cordelia coughed.

“I was just a little surprised. I'm sorry.”

She hadn't just been a little surprised, but she said that to calm herself down. *That's right, like Onii-sama said, there's nothing for me to panic about.*

“I don't think anyone would say anything even if you're interacting with Marquis Flantheim's son.”

“Y-you're wrong!”

No, there is. Unfortunately, there's something for me to panic about right now.

Of course, the only close friend I officially have, that I can send letters to, is Vernoux-sama. But I can't accept that he thinks I'm sending letters to Vernoux-sama. He's friends with me, like Gille-sama is, but strangely enough, I don't feel apologetic towards him. He'd definitely make fun of me if he found out about this.

(That's right, he'll definitely laugh at me.....!)

It would all fit perfectly if I said the person who I was writing letters to is Vernoux-sama. But I can't accept this, I'll definitely deny this.

Cordelia pressed her hands on her twitching cheeks and smiled the best smile she could muster.

"Onii-sama, you've got it wrong. I don't send letters to Vernoux-sama."

"You don't?"

"No. In the past, I wanted more stationery so that I could practice my writing. Thanks to that, I'm now able to write letters to Hazel-sama without embarrassing myself."

The conversation was heading in a strange direction, and she became desperate. *These random words are carefully coming out*, she thought, as she spoke. *I don't like lying, but it's charming to tell a small white lie.* She convinced herself.

"..... Well, it seems like Vernoux comes over a lot, so it's not like you'll start writing to him now."

She didn't know if he accepted her answer or not, but he didn't question her any further. She patted her chest while recalling that this had happened in the past too, when she had consulted Elvis about what gift to get for Gille without revealing his name, and Elvis had thought that the gift was for Vernoux.

(There's no way Vernoux-sama would become an obstacle for my love life..... right?)

She worried a little and firmly decided to deny this if it did happen. At the same time, she also thought, *I have to be careful so that I don't get in the way of Vernoux-sama's love life. Ladies who misunderstand our relationship like Hazel-sama will probably come at me. However, in Hazel-sama's case, Vernoux-sama had used me to make her think that.*

"In any case, you should also exchange diaries with someone whom you write to, and see the results for yourself."

Cyrus, who had said that, had already finished his breakfast. Cordelia quickly stopped him as he was about to go back to his room.

"Onii-sama, please give me the diary later."

"Okay. I'll give it to you before I leave."

"Thank you very much."

After he'd left, Cordelia felt as if the strings of tension had been cut.

(Of course, I'm the one who recommended it to him. So there's no reason for me not to do the same..... But-.)

However, she felt somewhat restless at the idea of exchange diaries instead of letters. She knew from her previous life that people only exchanged diaries with those who were special to them. Or at least, that was what she thought they were for.

(I'm already exchanging letters with Gille-sama..... But it's impossible for me to exchange diaries with him because it's too embarrassing.....!)

She also felt guilty that she made Cyrus do something that she was embarrassed to do herself, but Cyrus and Christina were engaged. It definitely wasn't a problem.

(..... I wonder if I should explain to Hazel-sama that I'm doing an experiment to find out the difference between letters and exchange diaries, and get her to do one with me. I didn't say if you had to do it with the opposite sex, now did I?)

Cordelia believed that she had to try it too because she had recommended it to someone. *It's certainly hard to ask Gille-sama to do this*, she thought as she ate her remaining food. But, her cheeks started heating up again just from that thought.

(I wonder if I can write adequately the next time I write to Gille-sama..... I'm also worried about that.)

Because she was thinking such strange things, she kept getting embarrassed whenever she heard Gille's name for a while, ——— she felt.

(It's nothing. It's nothing..... But I'm sorry Gille-sama.)

It's very tough.

The next time I write him a letter, I'll do my best to not get embarrassed so that my letters don't shake, she gave a long sigh.

Act 28: The Deceiver and the Deceived

After finishing her meal, Cordelia returned to her room to prepare to go to the Alcott mansion.

In less than half an hour, she left the mansion with Emina and headed towards the Alcott mansion.

Cyrus gave her the deep crimson diary before she'd left. Of course, it was boorish to read other's diaries, so she suppressed her curiosity and wrapped it in a cloth topped with a ribbon. She was sure that this would prevent her from 『seeing the contents when it dropped』. That was important. She might have seemed absurd, but she wanted to eliminate any chances of that happening.

Cordelia firmly held the diary as she sat in the carriage and she noticed a glanced from in front of her.

“What’s wrong Emina?”

“Ojou-sama. If something does happen, then please prioritise your safety first.”

“It’s rare for you to say something like that Emina.”

“I’m sorry if I’ve offended you.”

“You didn’t. You’re saying that because you’re worried about me, right?”

Cordelia just simply said what she felt, but she thought that her way of speaking could have been perceived as her talking down to Emina, so she quickly explained. But, it was indeed rare. Emina wasn’t the type of person to speak freely.

“Are you worried about something?”

“No. But I don’t have a good feeling about this.”

“Yeah. I don’t think anything good is waiting for us.”

At least, the desired result wouldn’t be achieved if this was a fraud case. However, she never thought that Emina would say something so obvious to her, since she had watched Cordelia grow up.

(..... Did she hear something from Onii-sama?)

If Cyrus, Christina’s host, had ordered Emina, then it wouldn’t be strange for her to receive instructions from him. He had also warned Cordelia vaguely about the matter, but he didn’t give her any information directly. She presumed that he had also done the same thing to Emina.

“Okay. Thanks, Emina.”

She was only spectating, he should have explained what he could to Emina.

(If Emina does know something, then she’ll give me some kind of signal. My job is not to miss it.)

Cordelia believed that and decided that she would observe Emina carefully. But, at the same time, she also reflected on that fact that she got Emina involved in that mess.

(I really have to do my best to thank her.)

I feel awful that she still hasn't taken her holiday for the Founding Festival, and now she's being involved in something that requires caution.

The carriage stopped slowly as Cordelia thought that. They had arrived at the Alcott mansion.

◆◆◆◆◆

Cordelia and Emina got off the carriage and were guided to the parlour by a servant.

“Good morning, sister-in-law.”

“Good morning, Cordelia-sama and Emina-san.”

Christina appeared not long after them, and her maid followed behind her.

Her maid was pushing a cart with tea and bite-sized cheese tarts.

(..... I can eat some calories if we're going to walk later. The tarts aren't that big,..... If I exercise a little when I get home, then it'll be fine.)

She had eaten enough at breakfast, but she couldn't refuse because the cheese tarts were small and Christina also urged her to eat in a charming voice, “Please have some.” She put the cheese tarts into her mouth and the rich taste of cheese and raspberry burst in her mouth. She was in an excellent mood.

“Do you like it?”

“Yes, it's very delicious.”

“I'm glad.”

Christina laughed happily.

“I'll go over the plans for today again..... There's another store that I want to visit apart from the stores I told you about yesterday.”

“Another store?”

“Yes. We don't have time to waste but.....”

“Of course, I have no problems with this if you want to go. Which store did you want to visit?”

Christina probably wouldn't overdo it with her request, but Cordelia had no idea where she wanted to go and tilted her head in curiosity.

“The sweets yesterday were very delicious, so I also want to give some to Cyrus-sama..... He also likes sweets, so if he would forget about work for an hour then-.....”

“Huh? Onii-sama likes sweets?”

“Oh my, he eats it a lot, doesn't he?”

“Eh? Yes, so he does.”

I've never seen him eat it before.

Cordelia swallowed those words and nodded vaguely. *It's not strange for him to like sweets.....*
Cordelia thought as she became vague.

Christina became bashful, "I'm glad."

"He always gives me chocolate whenever we meet. Oh..... But he might be used to the sweets in the Royal Capital because he eats them all the time. He might not be happy with sweets that he's used to."

"You don't have to worry about that. Even if he's used to eating them, he still eats it because he likes it. He won't be disappointed."

Cordelia added, even though she had never seen Cyrus eat chocolate before.

(Perhaps..... He just bought them to gift to sister-in-law.....)

She wanted to say, but she couldn't.

Even if Christina was speaking fondly of her loved one, a third party should not butt in. But, she wanted both of them to realise their feelings for each other. She contained herself.

(They're just not communicating enough.)

To solve this, Cordelia had Cyrus write an exchange diary. She placed the cloth on her knees and untied the ribbon to take out the deep crimson diary.

"Sister-in-law. I got this from Onii-sama."

"From Cyrus-sama?"

"Yes. It's a letter, but it's written in the form of a diary so that you have a record of your correspondence, I kind of forced him to write it. Do you want to take a look at it?"

"Diary....."

Christina received the diary from Cordelia and looked at it in wonder. Then, she muttered again, "It's a diary."

"If you don't mind..... you can write in it later. Could you write your reply on the next page?"

"Sure, of course, I'll do it....."

"What's wrong?"

I'm not surprised that Christina-sama is puzzled, she thought as she smiled and asked. Christina would become even more confused if she'd looked anxious.

However, Christina's response was a little different from what Cordelia had imagined it to be.

"Cyrus-sama always sends me a letter when the seasons change, so I was a little surprised."

"Really?"

“Yes, I always receive a postcard from him. The postcards are nice, but if he writes in here, then he might write more than usual.”

Christina narrowed her eyes and said that, and Cordelia was relieved. Christina, who was gently stroking the cover, looked a little nervous.

Cordelia grinned.

“..... Do you want to read it now?”

“Huh!?”

“We still have a bit of time left before the stores open. I also want to enjoy my tea.”

“Th-then..... I’ll just read a little.”

Christina was surprised by Cordelia’s suggestion, but immediately put her hand on the cover. She slowly read the words, and her face gradually turned red.

(What did you write, Onii-sama.....?)

She was curious about what was written in the diary, but she couldn’t tease Christina about it, so she drank her tea. Christina’s response to the diary was cuter than she could imagine and she thought, *if only I could act like that..... She’s reacting so innocently, but if I do the same, then I would probably look like I’m trying too hard. Only certain people could pull off this reaction.*

However, when she suddenly shifted her gaze, Emina looked overjoyed.

“What’s wrong? Emina.”

“Nothing..... I’m sorry, but I thought you two are alike.”

“What are you talking about?”

She tilted her head curiously, and Christina looked at Emina.

“When you read your letters Cordelia-sama, you also use your finger to trace the words like Christina-sama. You two are also alike when you read your letters so happily.”

Cordelia was surprised.

But come to think of it, I really do have that habit. The letters from Hazel-sama are mostly appointments and contain few words, so I don’t have to do that, but I certainly do that when reading letters from Gille-sama. And it wasn’t wrong to say that I enjoyed reading them.

(But I’m sure I don’t give off the aura of 『a maiden in love』 like sister-in-law does.....!)

She was afraid to say this out loud, but it was a huge misunderstanding. *I don’t think I’ve ever shown such an innocent smile while reading before. No, there might not be a deep meaning behind Emina’s words.*

“Cordelia-sama, do you also like letters?”

“Yes. I have a friend who I can’t meet, so we communicate through letters.”

“So that’s why you recommended this to Cyrus-sama. Thank you very much.”

Christina, who hadn’t noticed that Cordelia was panicking, smiled and Cordelia twitched a little in response.

However, the conversation ended there.

“Oh my, it’s almost time to leave.”

Cordelia agreed with Christina, who had looked at the clock. *Thank god*, she thought. On the other hand, Christina looked like she regretted it a little as she took the diary to her room.

When Christina returned, she smiled.

“I’m sorry for keeping you waiting.”

“It’s fine; shall we leave?”

“Yes. I’ll write my reply when we get back.”

“The diary isn’t going anywhere.”

Cordelia joked a little, and Christina laughed.

“When I’m with you, I don’t know which one of us is older.”

“Oh my, it’s obvious if you look in the mirror, right? I’m proud to have Christina-sama as my sister-in-law.”

Cordelia said, and Christina’s face turned red again.

◆◆◆◆◆

Then, they visited two stores by noon.

The first store was gorgeous. The owner had studied abroad and actively adapted new styles in his store. The second store was a very traditional store and was linked to the clothing museum next door. Christina was extremely interested in the clothing museum, but they left after she’d said she would visit again.

And, as they’d confirmed earlier, the two stores didn’t sell flora silk and Christina didn’t find anything suspicious about the two stores.

They had lunch and headed towards the last store when Cordelia heard an unexpected voice.

“Huh? Aren’t you the young ladies from yesterday?”

When Cordelia turned around, she saw the man from the store, which sold fake flora silk, from yesterday. He approached Christina and continued speaking with a grand gesture.

“This is such a coincidence! The weather’s perfect today so it’s perfect for going out.”

“Yes, it is.”

Cordelia took half a step backwards in response to Christina. Her face said that she didn’t want to meet him today if possible. Christina also seemed to be thinking the same thing, and she looked a little hesitant. However, the man didn’t seem to notice it.

The man showed interest in the store that Cordelia and Christina were about to enter.

“You’re visiting this store today……?”

“Yes. Father allowed me to get a well-tailored dress, but he wanted me to visit various stores before deciding.”

“If you want a nice and cheap dress then you have to get it done at my store. Look, for the price of a dress at another store, I could also make your sister’s dress too.”

The man didn’t stop even though Christina had evaded him well.

(We’re in front of another store, you know?)

She wanted to tell him to stop, but if she were to be too blunt, then it might hinder future investigations.

(I wish he thought about where he was.)

Cordelia held back her sigh, and pulled on Christina’s sleeve while tilting her head a little.

“Sister-in-law, we shouldn’t discuss business on the streets, right?”

“Yes, you’re right.”

Cordelia acted a bit childish, and Christina noticed her intention. The man was startled.

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry. Then please come to our shop again. The wholesaler will be coming today.”

“Wholesaler?”

Cordelia and Christina were both surprised by that word.

“Will you be discussing new fabric……?”

“Yes, we will. If you decide right now, you might be able to get special flora silk?”

Cordelia also spoke at the man who was brimming with confidence.

“Sister-in-law wants to decide on the colour, so she can’t agree without seeing it.”

“Then, do you want to see it? You can’t decide on the colour without seeing it, right?”

Cordelia looked up at Christina after the man spoke. *It’s worth going. If it comes to it, then we can leave by saying that you don’t like that colour, so we have to go.*

“Then……. I’ll go see it.”

Christina said gently, and Cordelia nodded when Christina looked at her.



Cordelia and Christina left the man for now and headed towards the store in their carriage.

When Emina opened the door, the man, who'd just returned, quickly came out from the back, "Sorry to keep you waiting."

A day hadn't passed since they'd visited this store and it looked the same as yesterday.

The only difference was that there was a young man in the store that wasn't there yesterday. The young man wore nice clothes and was talking with the woman while holding materials. That young man was probably the wholesaler.

The young man and woman looked towards the entrance when they heard the man greet customers. The woman smiled when she saw Cordelia and Christina, "Oh my, welcome," but the boy froze.

"..... Huh?"

Then, a question leaked out from Christina.

"You..... Ted? You're Ted, aren't you? Why are you here?"

The young man's confusion was also passed onto Christina. He flapped his mouth open and clothes, but no words came out.

"Sister-in-law?"

"What's wrong, Donnelly-san? Do you know this cust-.....?"

However, the young man pushed Cordelia and Christina out of the way and rushed out of the store before the woman could finish her question.

"Wait?!"

Christina immediately chased after the man even though she was off balanced.

"Sister-in-law?!"

Cordelia was late to react. However, she couldn't just ignore this even though she had been delayed.

"Emina!"

"Understood."

Without hesitation, she immediately left the store to chase after Christina.

Cordelia quickly looked around for Christina. Then, she caught a peek of her on the right, but Christina's figure was getting further and further away.

Cordelia instantly ran after her, but Christina was faster than she'd imagined. It was as if she had lied when she said her feet hurt yesterday.

(I was late, but it was only for a moment!)

Is this adrenaline rush? No, that doesn't matter right now. I might be able to catch up to her if I took off my heels, but I'm wearing straps today. She might get even further away from me while I'm taking them off.

(I can't catch up to her like this!)

Cordelia concluded and looked at Emina.

"You go ahead," she tried to say, but Emina had a different idea.

"Ojou-sama, please be careful, I'm going to increase our speed."

Emina said as she chanted in a small voice, then Cordelia felt her feet repel from the floor.

(Is this Emina's magic?)

Her body suddenly became lighter, and she got faster just like Emina had stated. It felt as if she was being pushed from the ground. However, her balance was delicate so she would fall to the ground if she weren't careful.

(But, we can catch up to her like this!)

I won't fall. Cordelia told herself and concentrated on chasing after Christina.

Christina chased the young man into a narrow road without hesitation.

(I wish you would stay on the big roads.....!)

It was only a street away from the main street, but there weren't many people around. It wasn't a dangerous place, but she felt anxious that there weren't many people around while she was chasing someone.

"It's alright, Ojou-sama. If we continue down this path, ——— then we'll reach a dead-end."

Shortly after that, Cordelia caught up with the two just like Emina said she would. Christina was out of breath, but she still rushed towards the young man who was at a loss.

(He might still run away even if it's a dead-end.)

When Cordelia thought that, a loud sound came from behind her and a figure appeared. She looked back in fright and saw a mud wall almost as tall as Emina. She concluded that Emina had blocked off the path because her hands were raised.

(..... So Emina is good with magic that tampers with earth.)

The acceleration from before was probably the same. Emina used to be a noble, so she probably had a lot of magic power. Therefore, it wouldn't be strange if she could cast grand magic.

On the other hand, the young man saw Emina's magic and was petrified.

"Cordelia-sama and Emina-san. I'm sorry for rushing out on my own."

"That's fine. Who is this person.....?"

Christina was breathless and had her back turned towards Cordelia and Emina, so Cordelia couldn't see what her expression was. But, she could tell from Christina's voice that she was tensed.

"He is the son of the executive of the production association and the manufacture of flora silk..... What is the meaning of this Ted?"

The young man named Ted scrunched up his face. He looked like a child being scolded. However, this wouldn't be settled easily if he was someone who was involved in the distribution of fake flora silks. He pulled his lips into a line and stayed quiet for a while. Then, he eventually looked up and spoke.

"..... I'm not doing anything wrong..... The one's.....!"

Cordelia thought *this is bad* when she saw the look in his eyes, and then Ted put his hand into his pocket and kicked on the ground.

Cordelia threw a seed that she had hidden in her cuff at Ted who was quickly approaching Christina. She activated her magic, and the plant grew rapidly. The vine wrapped around Ted's arm and the knife dropped to Ted's feet with a loud clunk.

"I had to do this because you were confused..... I can't even say something like that can I?"

Cordelia thrust her right hand out and declared.

Christina asked Ted a question as he remained silent.

"Are you involved with the fakes?"

"....."

"Tell me, Ted Donnelly. If you're involved, then that means..... that your family is also involved in this fraud, right? If I'm wrong, then deny it."

Her voice shook a little, but it was resolved. Her voice gave the impression that she was trying to suppress all her emotions so that she could stay calm.

However, since Ted didn't answer, Cordelia was the next to ask him a question.

"I analysed the silk at my house. They told me that it was produced in Flora. I don't know anything else..... But, it was you wasn't it?"

Christina widened her eyes and Ted looked even bitterer.

"..... If I had been born a noble like you, then I wouldn't have had to do something like this."

"Noble? What are you talking about?"

Ted's voice was quiet, but that didn't mean they couldn't hear him.

Christina frowned and asked him to repeat himself, then Ted smiled crookedly.

"I'm the one selling the mixed weaved flora silk. I wanted money."

"Money?"

“Yeah. Of course, we’ve earned more income than the average person in the Royal Capital thanks to flora silk. But, that’s not enough..... I want medicine that could only be bought by rich people.”

“Medicine that could only be bought by rich people?”

Christina and Cordelia’s voices overlapped. Ted sneered at them and continued.

“I can buy it if I’m rich, right? The medicine for the Dark Fever’s prognostic symptoms.”

“What?”

“But I have to buy it from some dangerous people because we’re not rich.....!”

Dark Fever.

Cordelia also knew that disease.

It was the cause of the 『Dark Winter』 which she had suffered when she was three. It was an epidemic that year, but that didn’t mean that the illness had disappeared since then. Although it wasn’t something that couldn’t be healed, there were some who died, depending on their symptoms, and some who became paralysed. Of course, people have been researching it and medicine continued to improve, but they didn’t have any medicine that could heal it entirely, since the symptoms varied from year to year.

(But where did he hear that from?)

Judging from how he was acting, she could tell that someone important to him had the disease and was now suffering from prognostic symptoms. But she didn’t understand why he would declare what he did.

“I’ve never heard of that medicine before.”

Christina said in a confused voice.

“Lies. If you really haven’t, then you just don’t know about it.”

“It’s not just sister-in-law. I’ve had that disease before, but I’ve never heard of that medicine. The answer won’t change even if you ask the Royal Palace doctors.”

Cordelia continued since Ted didn’t believe Christina’s words.

“If such a medicine did exist, then wealthy nobles wouldn’t have died from the dark fever. But, they do. Children with a lot of magic are more prone to serious illness, they die or suffer from prognostic symptoms.”

Ted shook his head more and once again muttered, “Lies.” Cordelia continued speaking while watching Ted.

“Of course, I can’t deny that nobles are in a better environment for treatment. They even get to try the latest medicine. But, the medicine that you wish for doesn’t exist yet. If someone told you that it does, then they deceived you.”

“Lies!! Those people wanted a lot of money up front, so getting nothing of value for all that.....”

“Even if that’s what they told you to deceive you?”

Ted gasped at those words.

Cordelia knew that she was looking relentlessly at him. She could sympathise with him, but she couldn't ignore that. She had to listen to what he had to say, since there may be people deceiving him, and he may be conducting industrial espionage with fake products.

"Because they..... told me a story about how a kid got better after taking the medicine....."

"Didn't you find anything odd about what they told you?"

"....."

Ted fell silent at that question, and Christina spoke to him.

"You've been tricked."

"..... Ack!!"

She looked at him with sympathy, unlike Cordelia, which shook at his conscience and drew out the guilt he held.

"Then..... What did I..... deceive people..... for.....? But, because....."

Ted continued to spurt out nonsense. His emotions had gone completely out of control. His hope had disappeared, he felt guilty and was suspicious.

(..... I didn't expect anything good from this, but this is really unpleasant.)

She felt as she asked Ted a question in a business-like way.

"I wonder how much you sold. Sister-in-law only noticed this year. Did you sell more before that too?"

"..... No, I didn't."

"Really!?"

"It's true! I gave them the advance three years ago, and I certainly planned this. But it's not easy to deceive the association. I didn't tell dad about this, so..... I had the silks made, but it wasn't enough to sell. Even now, I haven't sold to any other store except that one."

"If that's true, then the damage is minimal..... Does that store know that those are fakes?"

"I don't know. But..... it doesn't seem like they do from our conversations. Someone else came with me to tell them about the distribution route, and they've never asked me about it directly. I haven't....."

Ted regained his senses and fumbled towards the end.

It doesn't seem like he's lying, Cordelia thought. He's a great actor if this is a lie. But, it's strange.

"If that's true, then this is strange."

"..... Are you saying that my words sound like lies because I've deceived people?"

“No. I thought about this last night, the scale of this fraud is way too small. I don’t understand the motive behind it.”

Ted widened his eyes. Christina, on the other hand, agreed, “You’re right.” Cordelia explained to Ted who was confused.

“Selling to one store..... This is a weird way to put it but, it’s not worth the risk to prepare for something so troublesome. It’s also odd for them to let someone like you operate the fraud since you would spill everything. The crooks who deceived you are competent.”

“.....”

“..... However, this isn’t the place to have a conversation like this. Let’s move———.”

To another place.

A sharp chill ran down her back, and she couldn’t continue her words. She glared in the direction of the presence.

“This is surprising. I’ve been found, even though I’ve hidden my presence.”

Since when?

A person who hadn’t been here when they’d first arrived was looking down at Cordelia from the top of a building. She concluded that he was a young man from the sound of his voice, but he had his hood down low on his face, so she couldn’t see his features.

However, she felt uneasy since his voice, which didn’t sound lively, had reached her, even though he was far away.

“Who are you?”

She didn’t ask in a loud voice. But, it seemed that the person had heard her clearly.

“Unfortunately, I don’t have a name that you should remember. You should know what kind of person I am from the look on Ted-kun’s face, right? See, look.”

He urged, and she looked at Ted’s face while remaining on guard. Ted couldn’t see the young man from his position, but he turned pale upon hearing his voice.

“You’re the one who incited him?”

Cordelia said, on behalf of Ted.

He has been eavesdropping on this conversation since the beginning. I’m also certain. But then it would make this more difficult to understand. Why did the mastermind purposely come out when he didn’t need to? I could understand it if he was an idiot, but I can’t declare that, since cold sweat is running out my back. I can feel an invisible pressure.

“I’m not the one who incited him. The ones who did all got captured, you see. I’m the one taking over from them.”

“..... What do you mean?”

“Mm..... It wouldn’t be interesting if I just tell you. Well, whatever. The ones who incited that kid were the idiots who sent a little kid to you and got the tables turned on them. Do you get it?”

The young man continued amusedly.

(Lara’s..... So that means that Ted was also tricked by that Dark Guild.....?)

The young man probably guessed what Cordelia was thinking and looked even more amused as he spoke.

“It seems like you understand, Pameradia House’s Ojou-san. After all, that incident happened because you instructed them. I thought it was a strange development, since the Earl and the knights wouldn’t welcome a suspicious kid..... But the truth was, you were behind it.”

“Since you know this, then you’re their accomplice.”

“It’s a bit humiliating to be called their accomplice. But well, I admit it’s not far from the truth.”

The young man said, while jumping off the building. Despite the height, he didn’t receive any shock from landing. He started walking towards them one step at a time.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about me harming that girl in the future. I’m not interested in her, and she doesn’t know the organisation well. It doesn’t seem like she’ll be useful even if I force her back, and it’s a pain to get rid of her.”

The man walked naturally and approached Ted.

“I haven’t properly introduced myself to Ted-kun either. I’m someone from the underground, the same as the people who introduced you to the job. I don’t know how much you know, but you’ve crossed a dangerous bridge.”

“Wh.....?!”

“Well, the girls have already said it, so it’s a bit late to tell you this. There’s no medicine and you thrustured yourself into the flames for no reason, Ted-kun. Well, the idiots who invited you were going to get their hands on real flora silk.”

Ted was at a loss for words, and the young man patted Ted’s shoulder as if to comfort him. However, the man’s voice didn’t match with his actions, and he didn’t conceal how happy he was.

“If that’s true, then Ted-kun wouldn’t have to make the fakes after those people were captured. And no one would want to take over.”

“.....”

“I don’t care about this plan, I can crush it at any time..... I heard that the daughter of the Alcott House, who is connected to the Pameradia House, sniffed out the fakes, so I came to play.”

“..... Play?”

Cordelia frowned upon the word that didn’t fit. In contrast to Cordelia’s dubious voice, the man laughed happier and happier.

“The face of a kid who has abandoned his pride and got his hands dirty, and the kid who buried people from the Dark Guild even if they were underlings. I thought it might be interesting to see you two as a set. I’m so glad it turned out just like I’d expected. It’s cheap, but it’s not a bad play.”

The man clapped his hands as if he was enjoying this as an audience and Christina tried to step forward. But, Cordelia stopped her straight away. The man strangely consented when he saw that, “Yes, you have good judgement after all.”

“I really like it how you don’t fling yourself about here, even though there’s someone vile in front of you.”

“I’m surprised you realise that you’re vile.”

“It’s not that I am, it’s just I realise that that’s how people view me.”

Cordelia had talked back to him, but it took everything she had just to think about what she should do. If she were to base her actions on feelings only, then she wanted to attack him. But she couldn’t read his abilities at all. The man wouldn’t attack them, but she didn’t have an opening.

(I don’t want to run away. But, I can’t even find an opening to run away in the first place.)

I’m sure that Emina is also searching for an opportunity. The man addressed Ted again while Cordelia thought that.

“You don’t have to be scared, Ted-kun. I said it, didn’t I? I want to see you in despair. Of course, you’ll despair more if you had to bury your precious sister..... But other people will see you like that, so I’m not really interested.”

The man said as he pushed his hood back.

What appeared was red fox eyes.

(Red eyes.....?!)

Cordelia gasped.



There were people outside of the Pameradia House with red eyes, but it was indeed the signature of her House.

“Pameradia’s Ojou-san. No, is it alright for me to call you Cordelia-san? You’re really interesting. Why don’t you play with me? It’ll be fun.”

““STOP FOOLING AROUND!””

Cordelia’s rebuttal was overlapped by Christina’s. Cordelia gasped because Christina had said it so strongly. Christina turned red and raised her voice, which didn’t suit her appearance.

“It’s not like I don’t understand all that you are saying. But, even I know that you’re a terrible person. What? Making people sad..... Sure Ted did a bad thing. But why the heck do you want to see him? Also, people have been deceived by the fake silk, you know?!”

But Christina’s words only served to entertain the man more.

“Wow, so you do understand, Alcott’s Ojou-san. I just enjoy watching him reap what he sowed, and it’s the buyer’s fault for not being able to tell that it’s fake silk. Do people generally mistake what they want for imitations? You would question it if it was unbelievably cheap, wouldn’t you?”

“That’s enough!”

“Don’t yell. It’s not like I’m joking around either. But, if you want then I could?”

The man said, as he pulled his sword from his waist. Cordelia didn’t feel any killing intent from him, but he probably wouldn’t hesitate to injure them. She didn’t understand what he meant by ‘joke’, but she could tell that the situation was getting worse. That wasn’t a mere threat.

Cordelia still had some concealed flower seeds, so it wasn’t like she didn’t have the means to defend against his sword. Also, she thought that Emina could use defensive magic, since she could produce that mud wall. But she didn’t know if that was enough, since their opponent was someone from the underground.

(But we can’t just keep on complaining. It’s not like I can depend on a prince while I’m in danger.)

Cordelia convinced herself and took a stance.

(I’ve only learnt basic self-defence, but I still don’t like what he’s saying. It’ll feel nice just to..... hit him even once, right?)

If I can’t run away, then all I could do is take the offence. She had nothing to fear anymore when she thought that.

However, the young man didn’t brandish his sword.

“..... Too bad. It seems like our playtime is over.”

The young man narrowed his eyes as he said that and jumped back. At about the same time, Cordelia felt wind pass beside her. *The wall Emina made should be behind us.....* But when she thought that, a broad back was already right in front of her.

“Onii-sama!”

“Cyrus-sama!”

Cyrus should have been in the castle right then, but he was definitely in front of her. Cyrus glanced at Cordelia and Christina, but he didn’t speak to them.

“Emina, good job.”

Cyrus only said a single phrase. *Emina had probably..... called Onii-sama with her magic.*

Cordelia didn’t turn back, but she could hear someone running up to them. They were the knights who came with Cyrus.

Even in a scene like that, she didn’t feel that Cyrus was agitated from looking at his back.

“Taking your sword out in town is prohibited.”

“Yeah, I know. But I don’t want to follow the law.”

Cyrus informed the man plainly, and he confessed.

“Do you know? The law isn’t something that should be followed. The Kingdom only declared that 『If you break the law then you’ll be arrested』. So that means it has nothing to do with me, since I won’t get caught.”

“Are you going to run away?”

“Of course. There’s no merit in fighting with you.”

The young man said smoothly, as he ran up the wall and reached the top of the building. That wasn’t something an ordinary person could do.

“He’s going to pass the castle walls. Messenger, hurry.”

Cyrus quietly, yet firmly, instructed the knight behind him. Then, he began chasing after the man straight after he’d finished speaking.

Cyrus turned around for a second, and it looked like his mouth was moving, but she didn’t have time to ask him to repeat himself. Cyrus and the man had already disappeared from there.

Christina’s legs gave way when the two disappeared.

“Sister-in-law!”

“I’m sorry..... I can finally relax.”

“I’m not surprised.”

She wasn’t surprised that Christina’s legs had given way, since they couldn’t have imagined that a situation like that would have happened when they left the store. However, Cordelia couldn’t find the right words to say.

Then, a voice interrupted them, “Excuse me.” It was a female knight.

“Are you injured?”

“No.”

“Sorry for the late introductions, I am Clarice Keighley, and I work with the Deputy Commander.”

Christina was confused, but she smiled at the woman who had just introduced herself as Clarice and bowed.

Clarice looked at Christina and Cordelia.

“I’m sorry, but could I ask what happened? We would like you to tell us what happened here.”

“Certainly. But, could I..... take my companion with me?”

Christina shifted her gaze to Ted. Clarice replied, “Of course, I was going to ask you if you could.” Cordelia lost the chance to respond but concluded that it would be fine to go with her. So she didn’t dare to ask.....

“Mm.”

“Is something wrong?”

“The-.....”

Should I call him the young man or should I call him the suspect? Who is he? Cordelia wasn’t sure how to word this and Clarice smiled.

“We’ll also talk about that at the castle.”

“..... Okay.”

Indeed, this might not be something we could talk about here. Cordelia understood and agreed..... But, she was surprised.

CASTLE?!

This commotion was big enough for Cyrus to deal with it as part of his duties. That was hardly surprising. It was rude of her, but it was an extremely unlucky place for her.

(I hope nothing happens. I hope that I don’t see the Prince.....!)

Different from how she felt when she met the young man from before, Cordelia felt scared for her life.

Act 29: Before Things Settle Down

When they arrived at the castle, Christina and Ted were called on by separate people first. *Are we doing the interviews individually?* Cordelia thought, but she was guided to the parlour with Emina. They were treated to tea and sweets.

(This looks delicious..... This isn't the time to say that, right?)

Cordelia was puzzled because she didn't know what was going on and Clarice smiled gently.

"I'm sorry, but it's okay."

"Mm.....?"

"You don't have to talk if you don't want to."

Cordelia finally realised her situation when she saw Clarice's expression and heard what she'd said. *She's considerate towards a child who probably experienced something scary.*

(You don't have to be that considerate though.....)

She was definitely nervous when she had confronted him, but she had already calmed down. Her fear might have flown off somewhere when the young man had thoroughly angered her at the end. But even so, that didn't mean she wanted to meet him again.

In any case, she was sorry for wasting time.

(..... Honestly, this won't be settled with the word 'irritating'.)

She got more irritated the more she thought of it. *What play? Stop messing around.*

But, on the other hand, she was also concerned.

(I don't know how much I should tell her.)

She questioned how much she could say when she thought about Christina. Of course, she had to give Clarice information about the young man, but if the conversation were to change to the silk, then she didn't know how much she should say. In the first place, she didn't know how true a child's words would sound.

(I want to talk to Cyrus-oniisama..... Should I say that?)

The conversation wouldn't change even if she spoke to Cyrus. However, she could probably deduce what information was necessary and which wasn't if she spoke with him. It shouldn't be weird for a 『scared child to rely on her older brother』.

"Keighley-sama..... Mm, can I talk to my Onii-sama? I don't mind if he can't talk to me until later."

"Of course. The Deputy Commander has also ordered me to let you talk to him."

"Th-thank you very much."

Cyrus had already taken care of Cordelia's concern. *Onii-sama is so impressive.* She thought as she drank her tea.

“At any rate..... The Deputy Commander’s intuition is excellent.”

Claire looked relieved when she saw Cordelia drink the tea. Cordelia tilted her head in confusion.

“Onii-sama’s intuition?”

“Yes. He said he had a bad feeling and the man really showed up! I’m happy that no one got injured.”

From what Clarice was saying, Cordelia concluded that they guessed the young man would be there. *It’s not surprising for the knights to have information on the Dark Guilds*, she thought, but she still couldn’t ask about it further. If she asked about it now, then she would have to talk.

“I’ll be leaving now. If you need anything, please ring the bell.”

“I will. Thank you.”

Cordelia watched Clarice leave the room and confirmed that the door had closed, then she let out a short sigh. She couldn’t relax, but she felt calmer when there weren’t people around.

(But [his intuition is spot on] ?)

How far did his intuition go? How much did he predict? She thought as she looked at Emina who was sitting across from her.

Then she suddenly remembered something she’d forgot to ask Emina.

“Say, Emina are you good at magic?”

Cordelia thought that was one of the reasons why Cyrus had chosen Emina as an attendant. But she didn’t know that Emina was so good at magic.

Emina shook her head a little.

“I can use it to defend to a certain extent, but it’s not good enough for an escort.”

“But, you’re the one who called Onii-sama, right?”

“I did.”

Emina answered yes to the second question.

“Cyrus-sama asked me yesterday to contact him if anything happens. I can tamper with earth, so I could easily send signals if I know the place in advance.”

“That’s a handy skill.”

“It’s called 『signal』 for convenience, but unfortunately, it’s just vibrations. There’s also the risk of the message not being transmitted because of wrong predictions, and it could also be drowned out by other sounds.”

“..... I take that back. It seems very hard to control. You know a lot about earth magic.”

For a moment, she thought, *I’ll be happy if I can copy it*, but delicate control was necessary and would be hard with her attributes. But Emina negated Cordelia’s words again.

"I don't. I studied magic when I became an adult. Actually, I wouldn't have had to learn magic if I hadn't eloped."

"Excuse me?"

Eloped?

Cordelia blinked at the surprising confession. She knew that Emina had a reason for leaving home, but she never expected that was the reason. And, she had confessed it so suddenly.

However, in contrast to Cordelia who was surprised, Emina calmly continued.

"I was born to a noble house."

"Yes, I know."

"But I wanted to marry a commoner, who I'd met by chance. My family opposed it and strictly prohibited me from going out. So, I learnt magic to sneak out. Fortunately, I was compatible with earth magic, so it was easy to make an escape route. Later, I could easily lose the pursers my parents sent after me..... My family eventually gave up, and let me leave under the condition that I never return."

(..... She actually eloped.)

"I worked at the market for a while. I was close to your sister before, and she eventually invited me to work for your family."

She spoke blandly, but her actions were very bold for a lady. *I can't imagine her behaving like that since she's so modest now. And I didn't know she was married.....*

No, more importantly.....

(The power of love is so magnificent..... Isn't it?)

When she thought back on Marquis Flantheim's love story and the confession between Aisha and Warren, then it must be so. However, unfortunately, it was something that she couldn't vision right now.

(I wonder if it's difficult to understand this without experiencing love.)

I don't know if I'll ever meet that person, but I have to become a beautiful lady with good manners, Cordelia decided. *I'll do my best.*

Although she had made this decision, something that Emina said had bothered her.

"But, isn't it hard for you to work for us Emina? You don't get to meet your husband often because you live in our mansion, right?"

Isn't it hard to live away from the person she'd eloped with?

"It's enough for me if I get to go home on holidays. It's easier to work than living in the environment I was in. My husband's legs aren't great, so it's difficult for him to work outside. My wages are also excellent, so I'm extremely thankful for this job."

“If you’re alright with it, then that’s fine..... I’m not Onee-sama, so I might not notice if I ask you to do something unreasonable. If I ask for too much, then don’t hesitate to tell me, alright?”

She didn’t know if it was alright to ask Emina about her history, so she never dared. But she regretted it a little now. If she had asked earlier, then she would have thought more about Emina’s circumstances.

“I’m pleased to be by your side right now, Ojou-sama. Being by your side lifts my spirits.”

“..... Really?”

“Yes. It’s very eye-catching..... how you always think of new ideas, how you can’t leave people alone and how I never know what you’re going to do next.”

Was the last thing a compliment? Cordelia was confused for a second, but Emina wasn’t sarcastic. Therefore, Cordelia smiled wryly.

“But, if you have something you want to say then tell me. Okay?”

“I will. But I know my family is waiting for me, so I don’t mind separating from them for a while. Please let me work so I can come home proudly.”

Emina smiled as she spoke.

Onee-sama knows about Emina’s situation since they’ve been friends for a while, so she probably wouldn’t ask Emina to do a job that would put her at a disadvantage. So, Cordelia didn’t ask her any more questions. It would be rude to persistently ask her about this after seeing her expression.

“Would you tell me more about this later? Also about your wonderful husband.”

“I’ll be happy to. I also have stories about my children [1]. I miss my husband who takes care of me so much so you might get a little jealous.”

(..... So Emina is a mother.)

Cordelia was a bit surprised that Emina had joked a little and smiled.

After finishing her tea, Cordelia read the history book that was left in the room while waiting for Cyrus.

A clear knock reached her ears while she was spending time leisurely. Cyrus and Clarice came into the room.

“Sorry for making you wait.”

“Onii-sama..... Thanks for your hard work.”

“I’ll take you home. We can talk on the way. Emina, sorry, but could you talk with Keighley for a bit? I’ll send you home afterwards.”

“Understood.”

(I won’t be going home with Emina.)

That’s too bad, she thought as she followed after Cyrus. When she turned around, Keighley sent her off with a smile, “Take care.” Emina bowed deeply.

Cordelia turned around, and the distance between her and Cyrus had gotten wider. She quickly chased after him.

“Where is Christina-sama.....?”

“The Alcott House came to pick her up. She’s already on her way home.”

“I see.”

Even though it was her first time at the castle, she wouldn’t get lost if she followed after Cyrus. They were probably walking through the shortest route to the carriage.



While walking, Cordelia felt like she saw a tall figure who looked like Vernoux and a black-haired boy on the opposite corridor across from the courtyard. But she didn't confirm it and pretended that she hadn't seen them. Lots of people had black or blonde hair. She had probably imagined the bad vibes she was getting. She was sure of it.

(..... That was a close call.)

At the same time, she sighed. She was glad that it ended with just that level of approach. She didn't even meet their gaze. She succeeded. Vernoux may have noticed her, but she can insist that she hadn't seen them. Then there wouldn't be any problems.

However, she could only be relieved for a brief moment. As the shadows began to fall and after boarding the carriage with Cyrus..... the aura became heavy.

"Do you have any excuses?"

"I do not."

Cyrus said bluntly, and Cordelia quickly realised that she'd made a mistake.

"I know that you couldn't have predicted this, but you were short sighted. You shouldn't have gone to a place with few people around."

"I agree with you."

This time, no one was wounded because of the young man's whim, but she didn't know if it would have remained that way if Cyrus hadn't come to their rescue. As a result, she could only say that they were lucky.

"..... It was Christina who had rushed out first, so I'm barking up the wrong tree placing all the blame on you."

"Onee-sama didn't do anything wrong."

"I heard that she ended up at that place because she was chasing someone..... I also plan on telling Christina not to push it."

Cyrus sighed lightly. He hadn't said it out loud, but she could tell that he had worried about them.

"I have many questions. What happened to the young man who ran away?"

"He probably escaped. The special unit has taken over the search, but he'll probably be hard to catch."

"Can you not catch up with him either, Onii-sama?"

Cyrus was one of the best in the kingdom, she couldn't believe that he couldn't catch the young man. However, Cyrus frowned slightly at Cordelia's question.

"Something unexpected happened. I can't tell you about it, but unfortunately 『Ghost』 has more bad luck than the rumours say."

"Ghost?"

Cordelia heard a word that stuck out like a sore thumb and couldn't help but repeat it.

“You didn’t hear about it from Keighley?”

“I told her that I wanted to talk to you, so she didn’t tell me anything.”

“Ghost is from a Dark Guild in Dulaus. Of course, it’s a common street name, but instead of seeking things of monetary value, he does whatever it takes to find things that amuse him. I’ve heard from the Dulaus officials that he’s quite a handful.”

Dulaus Kingdom was to the north of Crista Kingdom. Since the founding, they had often invaded the Crista Kingdom, and, even now, traffic is restricted between the two kingdoms because they don’t get along. However, the two kingdoms had been at a cease-fire for the last 30 years, since the enthronement of Dulaus’ recent King, but she didn’t know about it in detail.

However, he must be a really infamous person if his information was leaked even with the relationship between the two kingdoms.

(Such an annoying person has become interested in me.....?)

It could be said that the incident could have been worse. But, when she summarised the information from Cyrus, another question popped into her mind.

“Mm..... Onii-sama, you’re not chasing after Ghost right?”

“Yeah. At least I don’t need to at the moment.”

Chasing after the Dark Guild shouldn’t be the job of the Imperial Guards. But, if that were true, then it provoked more questions. *If Onii-sama were doing his professional job, then it would be difficult for him to show up just in time, like he had, even if his fiancée was in danger. The castle is far from where we were, but he had acted so quickly.*

What question should I start with? She thought, as she stared at him and Cyrus spoke quietly.

“I was in town today.”

“Eh, but you were with Keighley-sama and the other knights, weren’t you? You were also wearing your uniform, right?”

“A spy from our house reported that he saw someone who looked like Ghost. The information was vague, but I arranged a meeting with the special unit since they’re chasing after him, and I went to talk with them along with the police.”

“.....”

“It would have been great if you two hadn’t met him while you were in town, but my bad vibes are always correct. I made the right choice when I told Emina to inform me if anything happened.”

Of course, she was surprised that he was working on his day off, but the thing that surprised her the most was..... that she had misunderstood something.

“Onii-sama, where you perhaps investigating the silk-.....”

“Investigating silk?”

Seeing Cyrus frown, Cordelia was convinced that she had misunderstood.

(The warning, don't pursue it too far, was about Ghost.....!)

If so, then you should have told me more. But she could guess why he hadn't been clear. He probably didn't want her to get too worried with vague information. Even so, he had warned her. The only thing that had happened was that she had mistaken his warning.

"..... I should have accompanied you both."

"Huh?"

She reflexively asked at his unexpected words.

"But I couldn't prioritise my personal feelings since the citizens might be in danger."

He might not have been answering her question, but he continued speaking. His voice was emotionless, and Cordelia couldn't infer what he really meant.

But, she understood one thing.

"Onii-sama, you saved us."

Under normal conditions, she should have cleaned up the mess she'd made, but Cyrus had helped her. Emina also helped her. To Cordelia, that was all that mattered. Surely, Christina felt the same.

Cyrus didn't confirm Cordelia's words, but he didn't deny them either. He just quietly stared out the window.

"..... Anyway, can I ask you something else?"

"What?"

"We have spies at our house?"

"You didn't know?"

Cyrus said as if it was obvious, but this was the first time Cordelia had heard about it. And, even if he said they had spies, she couldn't imagine what they were like at all. *What kind of people are spies?* The image that Cordelia had of a spy was her previous world's ninjas, but the spies of this world aren't ninjas.

No, but, possibly.....

"Surely..... they don't lurk above the ceilings?"

"..... What will they do with the information on our house? They look out for any changes in town. As for our foreign enemies, the magicians are more than enough."

"I see."

"The spies are only hired by contract. Usually, they live out their own lives."

While reflecting on how wild her imagination was, Cordelia understood what spies were from Cyrus's answer. *I see. So we're borrowing the eyes of people in town?*

She kept in mind that she would have to stay out of the public gaze if she went incognito in town again.

“If you understand, then I have a question for you now. What was Ghost’s aim?”

Cordelia has stopped asking questions, and this time it was Cyrus’s turn.

“As you said, he just wanted to have fun. I thought he was the one who instructed my enemies from last time, but I couldn’t confirm this.”

“..... You’ve been singled out by an extremely annoying rascal.”

“Yes. However, I don’t know how long he will remain interested in me.”

Cyrus put his hand on his chin and looked as if he was thinking, then he frowned.

“For the time being, stay by Ronnie’s side as much as possible. Ghost is quick at escaping, and he tends not to fight against those who he deems to be stronger than him.”

“Okay.”

When Cyrus had confronted him, Ghost had indeed determined that Cyrus was stronger than him in a short time. *I’ll be troubling Ronnie with this, but if I think about it, we spend half our days together anyway, so this doesn’t really change anything. If anything, he would need to learn some noble mannerisms since he would have to stay by my side when Vernoux-sama visits.*

She thought about Ghost again.

(He wasn’t involved in 『Cordelia’s』 death flag right.....?)

The cause of 『Cordelia’s』 in-game death was her magic had run wild because of jealousy. The Prince didn’t return her feelings, and she was jealous of the Heroine. So, she had caused an uproar with her magic, but she couldn’t control it and destroyed herself. If so, then Ghost shouldn’t be involved.

But, it bothered her. *Aren’t I forgetting something?*

(『Cordelia』 was an incredibly selfish lady, but I wonder if she was calculating enough to cause a riot.)

The death of 『Cordelia』 had been a turning point in the game, but it wasn’t the end of the story. The game shouldn’t have ended with 『The Villainess has died, so the Prince and Heroine married peacefully』.

If I’m not mistaken, the two who had overcome the incident ——.

“..... lia. Cordelia.”

“YES?!”

“Why are you spacing out?”

From Cyrus’s attitude, it seemed that he called her name several times. After a moment’s hesitation, “I’m tired,” she said something that wasn’t a complete lie. But judging from Cyrus’s sigh, she hadn’t been able to deceive him.

“Don’t go out of the mansion for about a month. I’ll inform father.”

“Yes.”

“You don’t have to write reflections.”

“Ok..... ay.....”

She had many things to write in her reflection, and it was natural for him to give her a light penalty. However, instead of a penalty, he had been cautious and told her not to go out of the mansion because of Ghost.

A month is a little long, she thought, but it couldn’t be helped.

“.....”

“What’s wrong?”

Cordelia tilted her head in curiosity because Cyrus looked like he wanted to say something else.

“..... Have you heard anything from Christina?”

“Sister-in-law? No, nothing.”

“I see.”

While thinking that the conversation was strange, she remembered that she had been given Cyrus’s diary this morning. *Perhaps, he was asking if she’d replied to the diary. Or he might be confirming something else.*

“Onii-sama, won’t you practice smiling?”

Even Cordelia knew that she had said something crazy. Cyrus also didn’t seem to be caught off guard. But, Cordelia maintained her smile.

She thought that he was fine as he is now, but if he changed his attitude and showed his feelings, then it would be better. Christina might feel relieved if he did this instead of showing her his usual stiff expression.

However, Cyrus started to distort his expression. *He’s not practising how to smile, he looks like he’s disgusted.....* Cordelia laughed a little. She felt bad, but she felt that his expression was friendlier than usual.

↑1 Or child?

Act 30: Conclusion, Reflection and the Future

After getting home, Cordelia quickly ate dinner and prepared for bed. But, it was difficult for her to sleep soundly because she was still nervous... Or so she thought.

However, her body was tired, since she had used magic, and she had fallen asleep quickly, without any time to think.

Then, she realised that she was dreaming.

In the dream, Cordelia was looking at a paper puppet theatre.

The play was 『Cordelia's End』.

There were no other plays that made her want to wake up so much. But, unfortunately, she couldn't even stand up in her dream. Her body had been frozen by a mysterious power.

Cordelia sighed, *this is just a dream anyway. If I have to watch it, then I might as well burn this into my mind for my future*, she thought and quietly watched until the end.

When the play was over, Cordelia consciousness suddenly emerged.

Cordelia woke up and first took a deep sigh. It was troublesome to get up, so she put her wrist to her forehead while lying down, and then she let out a slow and pointless voice.

"It was a nightmare."

Yes, a nightmare.

The last moments of 『Cordelia』, who had gone mad from jealousy and was swallowed up by her own magic, weren't something Cordelia wanted to see. 『Cordelia』 may have been passionately in love, but that was a little too violent. *I definitely don't want to end up like that, and I will absolutely not get close to the Prince because of the bad omens...* she firmly vowed.

But, that didn't mean that she hadn't gotten anything from the nightmare.

"I might have remembered a possibility."

The villain who had appeared in her dream wasn't just Cordelia. There was a man next to her.

(The name 'Ghost' never appeared in the game... But, there was a red-eyed man who tempted Cordelia.)

She had no proof to confirm that Ghost and that character were the same person, but she had to be on her guard since they were too similar to each other.

(If not, the man in the game should have been easily killed after 『Cordelia』 died.)

In the game, there shouldn't have been anyone who could easily escape from Cyrus. *Is this the difference between a game and real life? Or is he a completely different person?*

"... In any case, it doesn't change the fact that he's a suspicious character."

If possible, she didn't want to meet him again, just like the Prince. However, unlike her feelings towards the Prince, she also felt anger towards Ghost. She didn't want to meet him, but since he was an annoying person who amused himself by involving other people, then she would probably have to confront him someday.

(Therefore, it would be pointless if he just runs away all the time.)

I have to obtain more information, become quick-witted, and become someone who wouldn't do exactly as he wants. Cordelia decided and got out of bed.

"Actually, I don't think I will be the one who would confront him, it would probably be Onii-sama and his unit... I want to be of help to him if something happens."

Even though I'm angry at Ghost, I can't just chase after him because that would cause trouble to those around me. So, I want to find something that I can do behind-the-scenes, like the spies of the Pameradia House.

But, even if I could find something, I've already caught his eye. So... I'll have to ask Otou-sama if I can learn a little more self-defence. Cordelia thought, as she changed and left the room.

She couldn't learn self-defence without an instructor. If so, then she wanted to do what she could do right then. *It's still dark outside, so I should still have some time before breakfast,* she concluded and headed towards the library with a light in hand.

"It should be around here..."

Cordelia said as she took some books, but she couldn't find the information that she was looking for. *I hope it's not in a place where I can't reach,* she thought as she once again reached for the books.

After doing that numerous times, she heard the door open.

She peeked to see who it was and saw Ronnie.

"Good morning, Ojou-sama. What are you doing so early in the morning?"

"Morning, Ronnie. As you can see, I'm looking for a book."

"You look well, considering what happened yesterday."

Ronnie looked a little sleepy, so he must have been on security duty all night. He returned the book that he must have been reading to keep himself awake, and spoke as if he'd just remembered, "Ah, my gift."

"I can't go out for a while, so I'll ask Lara to get it."

Cordelia said, and he replied in a voice that clearly stated that he wanted to skip work, "Then, I'll be her guardian."

"Anyway, Ronnie. Have you seen a book on the average life expectancy and risk of illness around here?"

“Average life expectancy? What are you looking for this time...?”

After he'd put his book away, he moved to where Cordelia was. Then, he took several books from the shelf above her and gave her one.

“I think it should be in this book.”

“Thanks.”

“What are you thinking about now? This data is quite different from the ones you usually want.”

Cordelia nodded.

“I thought it would be nice if I could set up an insurance regime. So, I want to discuss this with Otou-sama.”

“Insurance regime?”

“Yeah. It's a system where we collect money from the insured person little by little, and when that person dies, then they get compensation. The instalments vary depending on the person's age. First, I want to set up life insurance, but I hope that it could also be used when someone gets sick.”

Free medical care... is something unlikely to happen with the current tax revenue. But in Ted's case, if he had extra money... or if he could consult a teller about his situation, then he might have been able to hold his ground.

(I don't think it would be easy to think of a system when I have to start from calculating the death rates... I want to do this even if it takes many years to implement.)

First of all, I want to see how much the instalments have to be to get people to join. I also don't want it to be a heavy burden on them, and I want to see their reactions towards this system. There is a problem of how to manage the collected money, but in the future, I might be able to establish social insurance and improve public health care.

“I'll help you. I'm good with numbers.”

“Thanks.”

“It's fine. If you behave yourself, then I can do this much.”

Ronnie said as he withdrew some more books, and Cordelia glanced at him.

“... Did Otou-sama ask you to guard me? Or was it Onii-sama?”

“I'll leave it up to your imagination. It's just a precaution.”

I see.

I don't know who instructed him, but apparently, they think I'm going to act rash because they told him to guard me at home.

“I plan to behave for a month so that they don't lose faith in me.”

Perhaps Ronnie reminded her because he had already started doubting her. But Ronnie laughed.

“You don’t have to worry about that. Christina-sama didn’t get hurt because you made the right decision. I heard that from Emina’s report.”

“That’s because Emina was there.’

“But, Master and Cyrus-sama also agree with it. Well, but I guess he’s still worried. Master loves Ojou-sama, after all.”

Ronnie teased her, and she got a bit worried about him. He had said that he’d leave it to her imagination, but he accidentally told her that it was Elvis who’d instructed him to do so. But, she was happy that he had pointed out that he cherished her instead of losing confidence in her.

“Oh, you might have forgotten because a lot of things have happened. But, my family is expecting you to start the negotiations soon.”

“I haven’t forgotten, I wouldn’t. But I want to review the data again...”

“Alright. Then I’ll tell them that negotiations will take place in 10 days, so please finish the details by then.”

Ronnie briskly handled everything and Cordelia shrugged her shoulders as though she knew that well.

◆◆◆◆◆

Christina visited Cordelia as eight days passed, while she was putting together the documents and data.

“How do you do, Cordelia-sama?”

“Hello, sister-in-law.”

“Would you like to eat these... while we go over the report?”

The gift that Christina had brought with her was chocolate bought from the store which Christina wanted to visit on that day.

“Thank you very much. Actually, I heard that you would be visiting today, so I had tea prepared in the greenhouse.”

“Oh my, that’s wonderful.”

Then, Cordelia guided Christina to the greenhouse.

When they both sat down, Lara brought out the chocolate and tea. Emina was having a late holiday today, so Lara was performing her duties. This was the first time that Lara had served a guest, but she fulfilled her duty well, even though she was a little nervous.

Then, Lara left the room after she’d finished her task.

“... In the end, Ted was supposed to be convicted for fraud... But, I paid for him, and the incident ended.”

“... What do you mean?”

She thought that Christina would probably tell the result of the incident, but the punishment that Ted had received was lighter than she'd anticipated.

Christina continued while looking conflicted.

“Ted had declared that he'd tricked everyone, but the people who had purchased the dress didn't admit that they were deceived. They said, ‘I wanted this dress even if it wasn't made from Flora Silk’.”

“What?”

“Therefore, they feared that the women had been deceived even though there had been no real harm, and he was going to be processed for attempted fraud... But, the purchasers claimed that the store clerk had explained that it was a completely different product. They all said that.”

No, that shouldn't be true.

In fact, Christina-sama's friend had said that she had purchased a floral silk dress. And yet.....

Cordelia tried to think of the reason for this, but could only come up with one answer.

“... Is it because of their noble pride?”

“Yes. I think so.”

Christina answered clearly, and Cordelia got dizzy for a second.

Good or bad... No, it's not good. I can't say that it's good that they can't recognise their own failures. Pride is important, but I can't help but think that it's because of their vanity.

But Ted had undoubtedly gotten off with a light punishment. She felt a little mixed over that. Like this, they wouldn't question Ghost about the crime he instigated, even if he is caught. Unfortunately, Ted would just be sprouting nonsense if he insisted that he was instructed to scam the women, and the victims insist that they weren't scammed.

“Finally, the store was fined for ‘displaying products that weren't sold in store and selling similar products’, and Ted was fined for ‘ignoring that there was a mistake in the store's listings and selling them substitute items’. They agreed to better themselves.”

“..., I see.”

“I heard that this came as a great surprise to the store and that they were disappointed. Still, I heard that they knew that the materials hadn't been obtained through a legal route, so they didn't have any objections. Of course, this might be because they'd only received a light punishment.”

“.....”

“But, flora silk hadn't received any damage from this incident. Fortunately, not many people had purchased the fakes, and father and I knew one of the people who had... So we settled it by presenting her with a dress as a thank you.”

“She might be hesitant to refuse if it's a thank you present.”

“That’s right. The silver lining is that the damage was minimal. Even so, it’s quite expensive,” Christina laughed.

However, her expression gradually dimmed.

“But... Ted’s actions are a betrayal towards the people of Flora. Given his family’s position in the association, it would probably be hard for them to welcome him back. Of course, Ted understands this, but I feel a little bit conflicted over it since he hadn’t done it for personal gain.”

She couldn’t forgive him since she was the daughter of the feudal lord, but she was still worried about him. Cordelia put a piece of chocolate into her mouth.

She enjoyed the sweetness as it melted in her mouth while thinking about how she could help Christina.

She spoke as soon as the chocolate melted down her throat.

“If he’s good at judging fabric in general, then I can introduce him to a job which would allow him to live comfortably. I also trade a little, so I want talented people.”

“But...”

“It’s also better for you if he stays somewhere you can keep an eye on him, right? Of course, I won’t force him if he says no.”

Cordelia said, and Christina whispered, “Thank you.”

“Let’s stop talking about this now. You also have business with Onii-sama, right?”

Christina was surprised by Cordelia’s words and her face immediately turned red.

“Mm... Well, I brought him some sweets and the reply to his diary entry. I know this isn’t the time to be doing this...”

“It’s fine. You wrote him a reply because everything’s been wrapped up, right?”

Cordelia said as she received the diary and sweets from Christina.

“Do you have anything you want me to pass on to him?”

“It’s okay, I’ll tell him the next time I see him.”

Christina smiled bashfully, and Cordelia laughed.

“Alright. Then you can tell him today.”

“Huh?”

Cordelia paid no attention to Christina’s dumbfounded question and lightly rang the bell that had been placed on the table; then the door opened, and Lara appeared again.

“Lara, can you call Onii-sama here?”

“Yes, Ojou-sama.”

Christina gradually became more confused while Lara was leaving.

“Eh, mm, is Cyrus-sama home?”

“Yes, sorry. I heard that you would be coming yesterday, so I told Onii-sama about it.”

“But won’t this... get in the way of his work?”

“Don’t worry, sister-in-law. Onii-sama has his priorities sorted.”

Christina-sama should know this, she thought and smiled. She planned to leave once he got here. Cyrus suddenly took a break, even though he had accumulated his days off. Cyrus, who had been hoarding yearly leave and even compensation leave, had suddenly taken time off. They should have a lot to talk about.

However, Lara returned to the greenhouse again.

“Ojou-sama.”

“What’s wrong, Lara?”

“Cyrus-sama has summoned both of you.”

“Huh?”

Me too? She had asked Lara without saying it out loud, and Lara confirmed, “Yes, Ojou-sama as well.” However, Lara also seemed a little confused because that was different from what had been arranged.

But, even though she was confused, she had to go, since she had been summoned. Cordelia and Christina headed to the parlour.

In the parlour, Cyrus was sitting on the sofa in his plain clothes, and next to him were two items covered in cloth.

“Sorry for calling you here.”

“It’s fine. Did you need something, Onii-sama?”

“First, I have something for Cordelia. Earl Alcott has sent you this. Lara, do as I told you earlier.”

“Yes.”

Lara nodded at Cyrus and removed the cloth from the small item, then a pearl pink dress with a patterned torso was revealed.

“Oh my...! This is a gorgeous dress.”

“It’s a floral silk dress. He also sent a matching hat.”

Cordelia froze.

However, she understood that this dress came at a ridiculous price. She became flustered.

“Will you receive it?”

“He’ll probably be bothered if you return it.”

Even so, it was uncomfortable to say, “Thank you.” She hadn’t had much contact with Earl Alcott, but Christina spoke as if to dispel her hesitation.

“Cordelia-sama, I would also like to ask you to wear this dress.”

“Sister-in-law...”

“Alright?”

Christina encouraged, and Cordelia looked at the dress again. But..., she felt anxious. She wondered if it was really alright for her to receive it and she also felt concerned about whether she could wear it or not. She would lose to the dress... She didn’t want to be in a situation where she had to wear it.

Christina seemed to understand her worries.

“Cordelia-sama, you’d shine if you wear it happily. So please wear it with a smile and make your dress happy.”

“But...”

“I’m thrilled to become your sister. I was the one who chose this dress.”

Cordelia looked at Christina, who was smiling, and replied in a small voice while feeling a little embarrassed, “Yes.”

The dress was so gorgeous, and she still thought that it might be too much for her, but Christina had chosen this for her, so she wanted to learn how to behave in a way that wouldn’t spoil the dress.

And as the sisters smiled at each other, Cyrus spoke in an awkward voice.

“Then, the next one is... a gift to Christina from me.”

He said as he took the cloth off himself.

A wedding dress emerged from underneath.



Cordelia was speechless, and Christina gasped.

“This is...”

“You said you wanted to wear a wedding dress made from flora silk when you were little, didn’t you? I never thought that the Earl would give Cordelia a dress, so it seems like it’s a rehash, but...”

Cyrus said as if he was starting over.

“I can’t say anything witty, and I can’t promise that we will become the ideal couple that you dreamt of. But, if I can grant your wishes, then I will. But... sorry, I can’t seem to express myself well enough.”

(No, that’s a great proposal, Onii-sama.)

As opposed to Cordelia, who was thinking that Cyrus didn’t seem concerned at all.

But Cyrus wasn’t the only one. Cordelia glanced sideways at Christina and saw that she was bright red. She couldn’t see anyone but Cyrus.

“Cyrus-sama, I know what you mean... Please let me stay by your side from now on.”

She was relieved to see that Christina was grinning and approached Lara, who was squatting. Then she whispered.

“... Say, Lara. Shall we leave?”

“Yes, let’s leave.”

Cordelia gave a big sigh after she’d exited the parlour, which had completely turned into a world just for the two of them. She was so surprised that she had forgotten to give Cyrus the sweets and diary she’d received from Christina, but she could probably give it to him after Christina leaves.

“Sister-in-law will probably talk with Onii-sama all day... Should I go back to the greenhouse?”

“I’ll come with you.”

“Thanks, but you’re already back to your normal self?”

Cordelia expressed her thanks while teasing Lara, and Lara pouted.

“I thought it would be easier, but it was my first time. I was so nervous.”

“Thanks for your hard work. Are you tired?”

“No. But, I’m a little more confident. I’m glad that I can substitute for Emina if she’s absent.”

Lara looked happy in the end, and Cordelia thanked her again.

“Thanks. The meeting’s already over, shall we go have tea in the...”

Cordelia’s suggestion was interrupted by Hans as they were climbing the stairs.

“Cordelia-sama, you have a guest.”

“Oh my? A guest?”

They hadn't made an appointment, so she thought it was Vernoux, but a cute face popped up from behind Hans.

"How do you do, Cordelia-sama!"

"H-how do you do, Hazel-sama."

Hazel grinned while hugging a book.

Cordelia was surprised because, unlike Vernoux, Hazel had never failed to make an appointment, even if it was one-sided. Judging from Han's actions, he didn't know either. On top of that, he looked troubled, so maybe Hazel had slipped in somewhere and hadn't waited for him... *Or something like that?*

"It's been a while. I couldn't see Cordelia-sama at all because of the Founding Festival, so I was a little sad. So I came over uninvited. How have you been?"

"Thank you for your concern. I'm glad you haven't changed a bit. We'll get tired from standing around talking, so I'll guide you to my room. This way, please."

I want to take her to the greenhouse, but she's holding a book, so she probably wants to show me something. Cordelia thought and asked Hans to tell Cyrus at a suitable time that she'd returned to her room.

Cordelia returned to her room and sat on the sofa facing Hazel.

"Hazel-sama, what did you do during the Founding Festival?"

"I spent most of my days reading to my brother. But they opened a part of the castle, right? I forced Otou-sama to take me to the castle for a day. It was gorgeous. I want to hurry up and become an adult so I can explore it on my own. Won't you come with me when I do Cordelia-sama?"

Hazel said, with an enchanted expression, as she recalled the castle and Cordelia answered vaguely with a stiff smile. *It's nice that she invited me, but it's not a place I want to visit.*

No matter how wonderful Hazel made the castle sound, she was only interested in the gardens, which had a variety of plants, so she couldn't react appropriately for the other parts.

"I also walked around the city for a bit when we went home."

Hazel clapped her hands as if she'd just remembered that, and Cordelia was finally able to respond.

"I heard that the city was bustling too."

"It was! I saw a lot of dancers in vivid outfits. And it seemed like there were a lot of rumours about the 『Dreamer Girl』."

That remark made Cordelia a little tensed. She knew that the Heroine's power was unique, and Earl Clydereine had been able to find the 『Dreamer Girl』, Shelley because rumours of her had spread far and wide.

(... Which means I will probably meet her soon.)

She intended to do her best to avoid the Prince and Heroine, but it wouldn't be strange for them to meet since they both held the same social status as Earls.

(She's unlucky for me, but I don't know what she's like.)

But, those were Cordelia's feelings, she didn't know how Hazel felt about Shelley.

"Are you interested in her now, Hazel-sama?"

Hazel-sama had said that she didn't like the 『Dreamer Girl's』 fortunes before, but did she change her mind after listening to the rumours again? Cordelia thought a little uneasily as she asked her question. Hazel groaned a little.

"Well... I think it's a bit different from interest, but I'm curious about what she thinks about while fortune telling, and whether she uses some kind of power. It might just be selfish of me."

"Thinks, huh."

Cordelia remembered that the Heroine in the game was as kind as a saint, and she used her power for those around her. But when she thought about it, she would become a little scared if she had the Heroine's powers. Her abilities would reinforce her words and give her a lot of influence.

(I don't have confidence if it comes from a dream.)

Even though her fortunes are never off, they were just dreams. There was no guarantee that the next dream would be spot-on.

(The Heroine has undoubtedly helped a lot of people since she believes her dreams to be true.)

Cordelia had never experienced that before, but she might become confident in her power, even if they were dreams if she helped a lot of people.

"But it's no use for us to think about it."

"You're right."

Cordelia smiled wryly because Hazel didn't seem all that interested in Shelley. She had to agree because Hazel's answer had been simple. She had thought about it, but there was nothing she could do except for being careful of her actions.

"Anyway, Cordelia-sama, let's talk about why I came today."

"Huh?"

"I found an interesting book. It's about love fortunes. Do you want to read it with me?"

While Cordelia had made her decision, Hazel held out the book she'd brought as she spoke gleefully to her. It had an impressive title, 『Love Fortunes & Charms』.

"... Don't you dislike love fortunes and charms?"

She had an adverse reaction to the 『Dreamer Girl』, and was interested in her for another reason today, but why this book? Cordelia thought curiously, and Hazel stared at her blankly.

“I don’t like fortunes that are always spot-on, but I like fortunes themselves. I also buy charms. You know, sometimes you get advice that you don’t expect, and it becomes a good chance, right?”

Hazel flipped through the pages, and then held the book out to Cordelia, “See, like this.”

“『If you think that your attacks aren’t working, why don’t you try pulling back? 』 ”

“Um, that’s why I’m distancing myself from Vernoux-sama a little.”

“Oh.”

“But it doesn’t seem like things are changing for the better. So, I’ll go back to how I was acting before if nothing changes within three days. If nothing’s going to change, then, it’s better to be stress-free.”

It seems like Hazel has already tried fortune telling and failed, but she took the results positively. Cordelia was relieved to hear that. Hazel had stopped thinking about Vernoux for now. It would be bad for Cordelia if the 『Dreamer Girl’s』 had predicted the result for it, but it seemed like Hazel didn’t care about that.

“It’s just like you, Hazel-sama.”

“Right? So next, I will... not rely on fortune telling, and make a charm that will work for love. The material is a lizard’s sun-dried fish bone...”

When Cordelia heard that, her feelings of gratitude from before had disappeared. Well, this was Hazel acting like herself after all...

“Hazel-sama, rather than a charm, isn’t that a curse?”

The book, that Hazel was holding, started to look eerie to Cordelia. *Please don’t curse me...* Cordelia thought a bit seriously, and she gave Hazel another reason why she couldn’t agree with that.

“And even I wouldn’t stock a lizard’s sun-dried fishbone.”

“Oh yeah. I didn’t bring one with me either.”

Although Hazel looked like she regretted it a little, she quickly shut the book because she knew it was impossible. But right after she’d done that, she showed Cordelia another book.

“Then, how about this one? This book features bouquets made from fabric. You can use it as decoration later, and your brother will get married soon, right? It’ll be a nice present for your sister-in-law.”

“That looks beautiful, but wouldn’t it be difficult to make if we’re not skilled artisans?”

The bouquet on the page that Hazel had shown Cordelia was superb. The bouquet was extremely detailed, and she didn’t know if she could balance it well. But Hazel smiled at Cordelia’s fear.

“It’s fine. Feelings matter the most for things like this, and sewing is my speciality. I’ll help you, so do you want to make it together?”

“Then... please do.”

“I’ll be happy to!”



Cordelia spent the next few days hectically; she studied in the mornings, made the bouquet with Hazel in the afternoons, and put the data together at night.

But, she didn't feel distressed because they were things that she had to do, but she felt a little sorry for Hazel, who often visited to see how the bouquet was shaping. However, Hazel didn't seem to mind at all... On the contrary, she looked as if she was having fun and Cordelia prepared Hazel's sweets as a small token of appreciation. Hazel was a straightforward girl, so Cordelia immediately knew which her favourite sweets were.

She also negotiated with the Eris firm while on house arrest.

Her negotiation partners were Ronnie's father and eldest brother. As Ronnie said, his family were all merchants, unlike him, but thanks to Ronnie's advice and her estimations, she had managed to drop the price of the paper to the lowest she could. They couldn't give her a reply straight away, about whether or not they would invest in her cultivation and improvement project in farm villages, but judging from their attitude, she could expect a good answer. They were probably reassured when they found out that Elvis had already approved of the project, but the balm sample which she had prepared for the negotiations had also played a significant role.

And Ronnie, who was listening to the conversations play out, gracefully sipped his tea and muttered.

"I'm sure father and brother are surprised. Most contracts aren't concluded in the first meeting for large deals. They probably didn't want to miss the chance to have a relationship with Ojou-sama, since she'd thought of this, and they didn't want to miss a big opportunity."

I would be happy if that's so. I have to keep studying hard and produce results so they will continue to think so, Cordelia thought.

(Above all, I want to report my success to Otou-sama, who showed his understanding.)

Cordelia thought as she signed the contract with the Eris firm.

Before long, she had completed the bouquet to a standard which Hazel had complimented, "Perfect! I knew you could do it!" She felt that Hazel had exaggerated too much, but she knew that she had made something that she could give to Christina without feeling embarrassed.



After that, three days later, Vernoux also visited the Pameradia's greenhouse.

"It's been a long time, Vernoux-sama."

"Yeah, since we passed each other in the castle."

"Oh my, did you see me?"

"You were with Cyrus-dono, weren't you?"

"I didn't see you at all! I wish you'd called out to me."

So he did notice me, she thought as she feigned ignorance. Then she urged Vernoux to sit down as if to gloss it over. Vernoux looked dubious... He looked at Cordelia doubtfully, but he didn't ask her any more questions and gave her an envelope.

"Here, your letter."

"Thank you very much."

However, Cordelia hesitated a little after receiving the letter and didn't open it straight away. She would typically open the letter straight away and write her reply, but she couldn't today because she remembered the agony she went through the other day.

"What's wrong?"

"... No, it's nothing."

It wasn't nothing, but I couldn't tell him the reason, she thought. Then she slowly and carefully opened the envelope with the paper knife she'd taken out from the cupboard. She had a feeling that she would accidentally cut the letter if she'd opened the envelope with magic.

Vernoux looked at her dubiously because her actions had been slower than usual. "You're really strange today, Dilly," she thought she heard him mutter.

"Well, whatever. Dilly, you promised Gille that you'd go meet the Green Witch with him, right? His schedule is written in the letter, so reply which day is convenient for you."

"I've been ordered to stay home for a while. Is next month alright?"

"In that case, write which days won't work for you. Gille will align to your schedule."

Cordelia took out her own planner and started to write her reply. While writing, she asked Vernoux.

"Has Gille-sama been busy lately?"

"Well, he was. Why?"

"His letter feels different, so I thought he might be tired."

His writing was still beautiful, but it wasn't meticulous, and his words were all over the place. Gille's writing would look very composed if he were not rushed by Vernoux, but this letter didn't feel like it had been rushed.

"Uh..."

Vernoux let out a long and stupid voice. It looked like something had popped into his head.

“He’ll cheer up if he gets a letter from you.”

“I’m not kidding. If he’s tired, then he should get a good night’s rest!”

“Well, he’ll sleep if he wants to.”

Vernoux’s reply was vague, and Cordelia dropped her shoulders and sighed. *We’re supposed to be good friends, so what the heck is with that answer?*

“I have tea that is good for sleep, could you give it to him?”

Cordelia said as she took out two cans of tea from the cupboard and handed it to Vernoux.

“One is for you. It’ll help you relax.”

“Alright, I’ll give it to him. He’ll probably be happy with whatever you give him.”

She ignored Vernoux and continued writing her letter. Vernoux picked up a sweet while watching her.

“Say, were you at home during the opening day of the castle too?”

“I stayed at home the whole time the Founding Festival was on.”

“Aren’t you secluding yourself too much? Research is important, but it’s also important to make yourself known, right?”

Cordelia raised her face.

“Even if you say that Otou-sama and Onii-sama have their own work to do. I can’t go out without a guardian.”

Even if they could take me with them, then I would rather go to the town around the castle than the castle itself. Cordelia thought, as she spoke and Vernoux looked shocked as he sighed.

“You should have told me. My father can act as your guardian, so it’s fine.”

“That might be a good idea, but if I go to the castle with the Marquis and you, then people would think that we’re engaged.”

In the past, Vernoux has used Cordelia as a shield to starve off Hazel’s fierce attacks. At the time, she only feared that they would misunderstand the relationship between the two. But it would be different if she was together with the Marquis, people might think that she was his official fiancée. ‘Just let them misunderstand,’ ——— saying that would just spread the misunderstanding.

“... If that happens, then the Earl might tell me to take out my sword.”

Cordelia had spoken mischievously, but Vernoux had spoken seriously. *Is he serious? Or is he joking with a serious look on his face? In any case, this should be troublesome for Vernoux-sama.*

“Poor thing.”

“Huh?”

Cordelia tilted her head since he whispered words that sounded as if it was someone else's business.
Who the heck is he talking to?

"I feel bad for the man who will tell the Earl that he wants to marry you in the future."

Vernoux was deadly serious.

"I don't think Otou-sama would do something like that."

If Otou-sama were to say something like that, then my marriage candidate would stay as candidates forever. So no way that would happen. ——— Cordelia smiled wryly and Vernoux scoffed.

"Dilly, you're still too naïve."

"....."

Why is Vernoux-sama acting so proud? She thought, as she once again denied, "He won't do that." *No way would that happen. This isn't even my wishful thinking.*

"Well, let's stop this conversation there. Let's go back to what we were talking about. Do you mind if I come with you when you go out with Gille?"

"Eh? I thought that you would be coming along. I intend to bring Ronnie as well."

"I see. Then I'll tell Gille."

He's asking strange questions, she thought, as she watched Vernoux nodded, then asked.

"I can't get in touch with Gille-sama if you're not there, so won't you come with us?"

"Well, that's true."

"And I can tell my House who I'm going out with if you come with us."

It shouldn't be a problem if I tell them that I'm going out with Vernoux-sama, even if he brings a friend with him. But, if I were to meet Gille, then I would have to tell my family who he is. Since he's hiding who he is, it's impossible for me to tell them.

But what's more, two people meeting up and walking through town... even if it was to meet his sensei. Isn't that like a date? She got embarrassed when she became aware of that. *It'll be okay if I don't think about it, but I wonder if I could stop...*

"... What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

She lightly coughed to brush it off as she continued writing. She started off with a bland greeting, then about which days wouldn't work for her, and finished it off by asking him to rest a lot if he's tired. But, the letter would be too short if she ended it here, so she added how she was lately, and about what she did during the Founding Festival.

(I don't need to imagine weird things. If Vernoux-sama is with us, then I definitely won't think about such odd things.)

She put all the blame on Vernoux for saying strange things. She finished writing, folded the paper and sealed it.

“Then I’ll tell Gille to send you the next letter after he’s decided on a date.”

“I’ll leave it to you.”

“Ah, one more thing. I’ll tell you while I still remember it. When you meet the Green Witch, I don’t want you to meet her as a daughter of the Pameradia House, but as 『Cordelia』. Of course, I’m sure she realises that we’re nobles, but Gille and I never told her our House name.”

“Alright.”

“Because the Green Witch acts as if she doesn’t like nobles that much. We’ve never asked her about it, and she teaches us properly, so it might just be my imagination... In any case, you don’t need a House name to ask her to teach you.”

Cordelia nodded. Then she remembered that Gille had told her that he’d met the Green Witch by chance. She had thought nothing of it at that time, but they had probably met when he went incognito with Vernoux. *It’s obvious, but they’re probably close.*

“Well, you’ll have fun either way. Stop looking so irritated. It’ll bug Gille too.”

“Huh?”

“You don’t realise you’re doing it? You don’t look like yourself today. I thought you started imitating the Earl.”

“... Vernoux-sama, just what is your impression of Otou-sama?”

“Well, he’s a peerless former knight, right?”

Vernoux said frivolously. Cordelia was shocked as she gave a long sigh in her mind. *What am I doing? (I didn’t realise it, but I must still be nervous because a lot of things are going on.)*

The people around her had definitely noticed, since Vernoux had, even if she hadn’t seen him in a while.

“What have I done...?”

“About what?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

She just thought that she still had a long way to go. She had many people that she could rely on, and, if she was worried about something, then she could just talk to them about it. She could think about it herself, but it was depressing how she couldn’t get to the bottom of her own problems.

“Thank you, Vernoux-sama.”

“Oh, you’re welcome? I don’t get it, but you can thank me with more sweets?”

My anxiety towards how Ghost would appear next still hasn't disappeared, so it's important to stay vigilant. But, if I keep thinking about him, then I'm acting just as he wants me to.

(Peaceful times are peaceful. I have to enjoy myself.)

Cordelia heard from Cyrus that Ghost had utterly disappeared from the Royal Capital and they couldn't find him anywhere. We might meet each other again someday, but if I narrow my view, then I might miss important information.

"I'm looking forward to going out with both you and Gille-sama."

So, first I have to enjoy myself on this outing.

A woman who knows a lot about medicinal herbs. Someone who I'm very interested in.

I'm not trying to ignore Ghost, but I want to move forward in the things I want to do, one step at a time. I'm sure this is the most useful thing for me to do.

Cordelia told herself and motivated herself again.

Extra 01: The Melancholic Prince

[Vernoux's Perspective]

STEP STEP. My footsteps echoed through the corridor that didn't have a speck of dust in it.

It was quiet, but there were palace guards around, so it wasn't like there was no sign of life here. However, nothing was moving, just like artworks, so there were no sounds. *It's excellent that they're faithfully performing their duties, but I can't help but think that I would get stiff shoulders if I were to do that.*

In the corridor which I was walking down, there were two guards at a door. The two guards noticed me and went inside to get verification. The door opened widely as soon as I got there.

"Excuse me, Your Highness."

I paid attention to the guards and acted appropriately until the door was closed. As soon as the door closed, I quickly walked up to Gille.

"You're late today."

Gille kept his gaze on the book in his hand and spoke without looking up. *Seems like he's in a bad mood for a change.* His voice sounded the same as it usually did, but he would usually say something to show his appreciation at this point. *But I can guess why he was in a bad mood.*

"What could I do? Clay caught me."

"Did you do something again Vernoux?"

"Why do you think I did something? He just told me something trifling."

And while we were talking, Clay unwittingly found fault in one thing I said, and it made things worse... That was all it was. Well, he was probably angry. It was my bad for wondering just how angry he was. Clay's reactions are pretty interesting, but it was more annoying than I'd imagined, so I'll hold back a little from now on. He's actually more serious than I thought he would be.

But, while I was thinking that, Gille sighed in shock.

"Try to get along."

"Well, little-by-little. Anyway, it's this right? The thing you were waiting for?"

Give me a break, I thought as I took out the letter that Dilly had given me yesterday. Gille reacted to the word 『this』 and finally lifted his face from the book. *He's so obvious.*

But his expression looked a little different from the fidgety yet calm expression he usually wore as he waited for Dilly's letter.

Right now, he was frowning, which showed that he was in a bad mood.

This is the first time I've seen him receive her letter like this. But I can't blame him since it's only for today.

It's probably because Dilly came to the castle the other day. He should be happy that she'd visited, since he wants to talk to her as [Sylvester] .

But when we saw her, she was already going home with Cyrus-dono.

He could have caught up to her if he ran, but, unfortunately, Gille couldn't do that. A calm Prince chasing after a lady he'd seen; he probably thought that Dilly would hate him if he did that. Actually, she'll probably be attracted to him instead. Probably.

But, if he had talked to her at that time, then he would be in a good mood right now... Maybe. I don't know how Dilly would have reacted, so I can't say for sure.

But anyway, he was sulking because he couldn't talk to her.

I should say something, but Gille wasn't taking it out on anyone. I think he's only being sour towards me because I'm the only one who knows about this. I can usually put up with his attitude, so I might listen to him. But I'll get angry if he goes too far.

Gille hesitated to open the letter he'd received from me, then finally he took the paper knife, that he'd received from Dilly, and opened it. He seemed to really like the paper knife, and I've tried to pick it up from the desk before, but he immediately went to pick it up. Apparently, he didn't like it when other people touched it.

Aren't you glad, Dilly? He's cherishing it.

Gille took the letter out from the envelope and looked over it nervously, then he relaxed.

"Why are you relieved?"

It's much better than his stiff expression, but I wanted to ask that because he was different now that he'd read the letter.

Gille slowly took his eye off the letter.

"Err, it doesn't seem like Dilly will write unpleasant things, so it should be okay... I would be bothered if she'd written something unpleasant about seeing me."

"Well, even Dilly wouldn't write something like that."

"I know. She might not have realised that I was there."

Nope. I'm sure she did notice you... I can't say that even if I thought it. If Gille accepted it as fact, then it was fine.

"You worry too much when it comes to Dilly. Be a little more confident."

You look unreliable, I thought, as I advised him. *I don't know how effective my words are.*

Gille acts magnificently as a Prince, but he's so moody when it comes to Dilly. If he were to act like that on an everyday basis, then it wouldn't do him any good. Gille should understand that the people around him are influenced by his emotions. However, he unexpectedly looked bitter.

"Do I look arrogant? I'm a little worried."

"You know your own position, don't you? If you act stupid, I'm going to punch you."

He's in a position where he can't be carefree. What's he saying? I glared at him and he awkwardly looked away. *I'm sure he said that despite already knowing.*

"Of course, I don't plan on acting arrogant, but I thought I might have acted like that without realising it."

"You know..."

I wonder if he should have made an effort to talk to Dilly at that time after all. I thought, as I put my hand on my forehead.

In Gille's position, it shouldn't be difficult for him to talk to the girl he likes. Then, of all things, he had to meet the exceptional Dilly. He's fascinated by a very difficult lady.

"Your personality doesn't change, no matter if you look like 『Gille』 or 『Sylvester』. You don't have to start worrying about it now. Dilly interacts normally with 『Gille』."

"Well, I know but..."

"Get a hold of yourself."

I tried to say things that would ease his mind, but I don't know how effective it was. Gille stayed quiet as he looked down and read the letter. *Did he get it? I hope he did. It'll be fine if he did.*

However, my thoughts only lasted for a moment because Gille's expression gradually got grimmer.

"Say, Vernoux."

"What?"

He said that in a stiff voice, so Dilly must have written something strange again, I thought as I spoke questioningly.

"I'm just confirming this... You don't want Dilly as your wife, right?"

"Hah?"

For a moment, I doubted whether my ears had gone bad.

"Sorry, could you repeat that?"

"You don't want Dilly as your wife, right?"

They were the same words as before. It seems like I hadn't heard him wrong after all.

"Why're you suddenly asking that? Did she write something about that in the letter?"

I want to question her about what kind of annoying things she wrote in her letter.

“She often writes about how people always think that she is doing things for you.”

“Haah?”

“She wrote that when she asked the Earl about a present for me, he thought that she wanted to get you something. Now, Cyrus asked her if she was writing letters to you. And people are questioning whether you have plans to get engaged to Earl Hale’s daughter.”

“Stop there.”

I stopped him from talking when I heard a name I’d never expected to hear. I never thought that Dilly would be so honest in her letters. I’m sure the last thing was just him reading too much into it. Well, if it’s about Lady Hazel, then it’s not surprising for Gille to misunderstand if he heard about her from Myles and the others... But I never thought that I would hear her name here. And I have to dissolve this topic quickly.

But I can see why the Earl and Cyrus were under that impression.

“It can’t be helped. 『Gille』 has never sent a letter directly to Dilly. If you were to send her a letter as 『Sylvester』, then it might be considered as a national proposal. Do you get it?”

I don’t think it would get that out of hand, but people will notice that he cares about Dilly, since he’s not sending letters to other ladies. Do you think Dilly would just quietly agree to it if you do something like that? The answer is no.

“I know...”

『You know that but you look like you hate it, Your Highness Sylvester』. I turned the conversation away from Lady Hazel as I teased him in my mind. *Phew, that was a close one.*

“If you get it then come to terms with it.”

But, when I look at Gille, I thought, *you could use the royal name a little. It seems like he doesn’t want to use his power as a royal, but he’s not getting anywhere like this. According to Gille, the Earl refuses to let his daughter visit the castle because she’s shy and immature. That doesn’t sound like Dilly, so if Gille insists on meeting her, then the Earl probably wouldn’t refuse to let them meet once. I’m sure Gille knows that... But he doesn’t want to order the Earl. His weird pride is getting in his way.*

Even I don’t know why she’s avoiding 『Sylvester』, so I can’t give him my full support. If I had to say something, then I want to tell him to quickly tell her that 『Gille』 is 『Sylvester』. I don’t think Dilly would attack him... No, I can’t say it after all. The damage would be too great for him. It’s better for him to decide things on his own.

But there is something I want to tell him.

“Anyway, would you care if I complained about it?”

“...”

“If you do care, then it can’t be helped. You should just act the way you want to act.”

Are first loves this annoying? I thought and realised that I've never heard Gille clearly say that he likes Dilly. *Well, it's not hard to tell from the way he acts.*

When I thought that, I remembered that Dilly had given me something.

"I forgot. This is a gift from Dilly."

"Huh?"

"She was worried that you seem tired."

I said as I gave him the tea can from Dilly.

He went blank, so I pushed it into his hand, and he stared at it.

"This is from Dilly? For me?"

"Yeah."

I couldn't find the words to say to Gille as he stared at the can as if he was trying to open a hole into it. Gille finally looked up from the can and seemed to be in an extremely pleasant mood.

"Vernoux-sama, shall we have tea?"

"Oh? You're going to serve that?"

This guy, is he forgetting that he was in a sour mood before?

I haven't eaten many sweets here, so I gladly accepted his offer. The sweets at Dilly's house are delicious, but I also have no complaints about the sweets in the castle.

"I wonder what it tastes like."

"..."

"Gille?"

I tilted my head in curiosity since Gille had suddenly gone silent. He looked mystified.

"You're drinking your usual tea Vernoux."

It seems like he doesn't want to share the things he gets from Dilly. I shrugged since he was acting like a child. *I can taste it when I get home.*

(I also got it, you know? I just haven't tried it yet.)

Of course, I intend to keep that a secret from Gille.

Extra 02: The Earl's Concern

[Ronnie's Perspective]

I never want to see my teacher at the Royal Magic Academy, whenever he summoned me when I was in school.

But now, I can confidently say that it was just annoying and wasn't that much of a big deal. Because I now know that it's terrible for my heart whenever Master calls for me. The Head Magician scolded me, "Did you do something again?!" but it wasn't like I did anything wrong. Ojou-sama is the guilty one... But I didn't say that.

Master had called me to his study. *The study really suits Master, since he's really strict.* I waited nervously for Master to speak.

"... How's her situation lately?"

He was definitely referring to Ojou-sama. He usually calls her by her name, so why isn't he doing it now? But well, I'll take this as him hiding his embarrassment.

Ojou-sama is currently under house arrest.

Even if she's under house arrest, she doesn't typically go out anyway. So, being on house arrest for a month only meant that the times when she could go on rides would decrease by two or three times, and that was all. It's unfortunate, but it doesn't seem like she's suffocating in the mansion. Ojou-sama is busy even though she's on house arrest.

"There have been no specific changes, but she's been secluding herself in the library lately. She might have already told you about this Master, but she has been thinking about insurance systems and the school. She's also doing a lot of things, so she's been busy."

"..."

Yup, he's acting like he knows all this already. Just like that.

Master was the one who ordered her house arrest, so he should be able to guess how she would spend her days. Ojou-sama won't do something if she's told she can't. If she's not told that she can't do something, then she'll probably make excuses to do it.

Huh? Then what's he asking me?

"... She's not bored, right?"

"Probably."

"..."

Master, you're sighing out your worries.

He doesn't show it in his expression, or gestures, but he clearly looks relieved. *I think Ojou-sama is really spoiled, but well, of course, I can't say that. Master, you don't have to worry! Ojou-sama knows that you ordered her under house arrest because you're worried about her~!*

... Well, I can't say that either. I don't know what kind of cold eyes he would look at me with if I said it.

Anyway, if Master's concern is gone, I wonder if I can leave now. Will he let me go already? But contrary to my expectations, Master didn't say those words.

"... It's not good for her to seclude herself too much either, is it?"

"..."

Ojou-sama still goes to the greenhouse and laboratory, even if she secludes herself in the library, so it's not like she's spending her days without any sun. Her health is fine, Master———. How easy would it be if I could say those words? To convince Master, I would probably have to present the reasons with data, but unfortunately, I haven't put them together.

But even though Master didn't say anything strange, I couldn't help but think... that being a parent is hard because they worry about their children. But I'll pretend that I hadn't briefly heard my parents' voices, "Do you understand?"

That aside, there's a limit to how long I can stand here quietly. The pressure coming from Master is also extreme, and I want to leave soon. Even so, I don't have anything to suggest. This is so awkward.

"Ronnie."

"Yes! I'm not thinking about anything!"

"... What're you saying?"

I'm sorry, I didn't say anything.

He was shocked that I'd replied rashly. *But is this a blessing in disguise? He took it as me acting like myself.* Master let a sigh slip out, but he didn't say anything candid.

"Ronnie, I want you to do a job."

"A job?"

By chance, is he going to tell me to chase after Ghost? I concluded that it would be better if I don't do anything, since he ordered me to guard Ojou-sama more vigilantly, and I thought that the knights would be handling the investigation.

But Master's order was completely different from work.

"Teach her defensive combat."

"Teach Ojou-sama?"

Defensive combat and self-defence were both defence techniques, but defensive combat is actually magic combat that you learn in the Magic Academy or military school. I also learnt it when I was in school, but well, you wouldn't actually use it unless you were in the military. —— As it were, it was

a technique that was foreign to ladies. Ojou-sama is already learning self-defence as a safeguard for if she encounters monsters in the forest.

I asked him again just to confirm, and Master thought for a while before putting his hands on his chin and nodding.

“But, don’t let her get hurt.”

I know that very well. If she gets hurt, then my heart might stop beating. But it’s also a problematic command. If she doesn’t get used to it slowly, then she’ll get hurt a lot during training.

“I think it’s impossible to teach her the methods used at the Magic Academy, so I’ll accept it if I only have to teach her what she can use.”

“Fine.”

Training... So, to sum it up, it’s probably challenging to teach her something that requires physical strength. She’ll probably say that she’ll train, but I’ll be troubled if she trains in secret and then gets hurt. She is indeed the Pameradia House’s lady, and she could probably fight like Cyrus-sama and Isma-sama if she trained seriously, but she’s not going to become a knight, and Master wouldn’t let her learn those things. He’s probably thinking about techniques that could buy her time if she finds herself in a situation without any guards.

At any rate, I have to go back to my room and find where I put my school textbooks. I’ll also look for a tool for treatment if she does get hurt. I don’t intend for her to get hurt, but there are no guarantees that she won’t be.

“Ronnie.”

“Yes, I know!”

“Know what?”

“I won’t let Ojou-sama get hurt!”

“Of course you won’t. Listen to me.”

He was shocked again, and I tilted my head, *what the heck is it now?*

“Teach that girl too.”

“That girl?”

“The girl by Cordelia’s side.”

“Lara? Is that alright...?”

Lara is being taught basic magic. She has that much magic power after all, so it’s a waste for her not to use it. She’s also learning the skills of a servant, but the higher her magic power, the better her work conditions will become... Well even if I say that, she doesn’t have to worry about it as long as she stays by Ojou-sama’s side.

“By the way, how much should I teach her? “

“Teach her whatever she can learn.”

Which means I should teach her everything if she can learn it... Right? But combat magic can't be learnt if she doesn't understand offence, it's a full-scale method unlike learning basic magic. I don't think anything would happen if I were to teach it to her, but I don't think Master has any reason to trust her. Even I can't come up with a reason why Master had consented it.

However, in contrast to me, Master didn't move a single eyebrow.

“She's not blind.”

“If it's like that... then okay.”

Lara, good for you. For whatever reason, Master has also approved of you... Right? That's what he means, right?

But when I looked at Master, he seemed to have noticed my doubt.

“If she's going to invite danger to herself, then she reaps what she sows.”

No, Master. Your tone and expression don't match. It sounds extremely fake. While saying it's Ojou-sama's responsibility, your face is telling me that's not going to happen!

Well, if I have to teach Lara everything, then I'll try to warn her that she might get seriously injured. I hope she'll listen to me, but I'm a little worried because she's a very bold child.

But it was astonishing to hear Lara's name. If he had told me to teach Emina, then I would have understood and replied with, “Oh, okay.” Emina didn't have as much magic as Lara, but she could use it to some extent, and Master knows her better than Lara.

But when I thought that, I realised something.

“Oh, if Lara learns this, then she could go with Ojou-sama when she gets married. Then you can be relieved.”

If Ojou-sama had to take someone with her when she gets married, then it would probably be Lara. She probably wouldn't be alone, but Emina probably won't go with her. But Emina would probably go if Ojou-sama told her to.

But I had definitely put my foot in my mouth.

It looked like a blizzard was dancing behind Master. It wasn't winter, and we're in the study... But a snowy landscape was definitely showing up behind him. And it was blowing my way...

“Ronnie.”

“Yes? I'll go get ready! Excuse me!”

I couldn't help but run away.

Yup. I knew it, Ojou-sama is really pampered!

But I don't think she will remain in this house forever. If she does stay here forever, then Master will worry. But I feel like he won't recommend a partner to her. But that doesn't mean he'll leave it to her, I meant that he will beat up any superficial man that she brings home.

"Parental love is so complicated."

I have a feeling she'll bring home a brave man, but I can't imagine who that would be.

"Well, it'll be hard for that man to take Ojou-sama if he can't get Master's approval."

Ojou-sama doesn't seem like she's good with love. She also thinks eccentrically, so the person who falls in love with her will definitely have a hard time. Well, there is the possibility that she would fall for them. It seems like it'll be troublesome because she seems like a late bloomer.

"... There's nothing I can do about even if I think about it now."

If I think about such things now, then I have the feeling that someone would retort 『You're the one who should get married! 』 My life is fun right now, and I'll get married if I'm fated to. So, I'll just ignore that for now.

Extra 03: The Apprentice Girl's Effort

[Lara's Perspective]

Ojou-sama secludes herself in the library whenever she has spare time. Although she does show up at the greenhouse and laboratory, she earnestly researched in the library and her room.

"... I don't know why, but it's boring."

"Well, what can you do? It's Ojou-sama."

"What is?"

Ronnie said briefly, but I didn't understand what he meant by 'it's Ojou-sama'.

"When she comes up with an idea, she gets really passionate about it. She probably won't listen to anything anyone says right now. In a way, she's stubborn. You know this too, don't you Lara?"

"I think it's inappropriate for you to call Ojou-sama stubborn, even if it's just a joke."

"Hey! You'll get hurt if you don't concentrate."

"I know!"

I'm learning defensive combat from Ronnie right now. Apparently Master instructed him to teach me. Ojou-sama is also learning defensive combat, but I'm learning the real thing. I was excited to hear that... But, I'm worried that Ojou-sama has been acting indifferently lately. I might become useful to Ojou-sama if I learn this, but there's a chance that she needs help right now.

"In any case, I don't know what would happen even if you went and did something difficult."

"I know that!"

"Ojou-sama would tell you if she wants you to do something, so you don't have to be hasty. In the meantime, you should work whether you'd like to or not."

Ronnie's seriously... I thought, but I knew that he wasn't making fun of me.

"Lara. Master told me to teach you this, but is training so boring?"

"It's not boring but-..."

"You just don't know it, but this is an amazing thing."

But, Ronnie seemed like he couldn't convey what was amazing and he pressed his right index finger on his forehead. I know it's a privilege to be taught this, even if he didn't show me that gesture. I could guess that this was a great thing because Master had to give his approval.

But, this and that are different. If Ojou-sama is doing something, then I would like to help her...

"Say, Ronnie. Is there really nothing I could help Ojou-sama with?"

“First thing’s first, I’m teaching you this so that you can protect her if she finds herself in a dangerous situation.”

“...”

If he was going to put it like that, then I can’t complain anymore.

“You have to concentrate and do what you can now.”

I reluctantly spread my magic out according to Ronnie’s words.

“... Well, how about bringing some refreshments to Ojou-sama after we’re done?”

I turned around when I heard Ronnie. I heard him say frantically, “Ah, idiot!” and then a small explosion occurred.

That was the moment when I experienced why he kept telling me to concentrate.

Fortunately, only the sound of the explosion was grand. It had only grazed our skins, and we didn’t bleed. Even though defensive combat involved condensing high concentrations of magic, it was a technique that specialises in defending, and there were a lot of tools in place so that the targets don’t get hurt in case something were to happen... Or so I reasoned, but Ronnie scolded me harshly. He told me, “It wouldn’t be strange if something happens, no matter how many tools we have in place, since we’re compressing our magic.” *The lazy Ronnie was scolding me that much, and saying nothing but annoying things, so I think the technique’s really dangerous if I make a single mistake.*

I’m going to think of what refreshments to bring Ojou-sama, since I’ve already reflected properly. This way I won’t lose my concentration.

“Ojou-sama doesn’t eat many sweets if Vernoux-sama doesn’t come over, does she?”

“Now that you mention it, yeah she doesn’t.”

It wasn’t like she didn’t have any sweets at all, but she only had a little when she ate alone and, in rare cases, she would only have tea. *Then shouldn’t I bring her something sweet to eat?* I thought, but I would only bring her what the chefs made. I didn’t think I could be useful to her like that.

“I wonder if I should try to make some.”

“... Lara, you’re going to make it?”

“It’s not like I can’t. But I don’t think I’ve made sweets before.”

Nevertheless, cooking meant using the right measurements and instructions. I confidently said, “It’ll be fine!” but Ronnie looked gloomy.

“You don’t believe in my skills?”

“No, that’s not it. You’ve never made them before, so you don’t have any recipes either right?”

“Ah...”

That was stupid of me.

Like he'd pointed out, I don't have any recipes for sweets. I thought of asking Emina, but she's on holiday at the request of Ojou-sama.

"... If you have something you want to make, then you could ask the Head Chef?"

"I can't. I could only make a degraded version of his."

I don't know if the Head Chef would teach me an original recipe, but the sweets the Head Chef makes would definitely be more delicious than something I make. It was a bit frustrating how convinced Ronnie was when he said, "I guess so," but it couldn't be helped, since it was true.

"So I'll visit downtown more and look for a recipe that Ojou-sama might like."

"I see. Something that can't be eaten at this mansion would be nice."

Even if it fails, it could be viewed as a unique taste.

"Ojou-sama seems very interested in food, so I'm sure she'll be happy with that. She recently asked the Head Chef to make her galette. Before that, she asked him to make tonkatsu."

"... Tonkatsu?"

"It's the pork coated in flour mixed with salt and pepper, then coated in egg, then bread crumbs and fried. It's juicier and more filling than I thought it would be... It's been served for dinner a few times."

"By chance, is that the deluxe fried food?"

"Yeah. It's probably that wonderful fried food."

I don't know the name, but I certainly remember a fried dish that I've never eaten anywhere else but here. I've eaten fried fish coated in flour outside before, but the coating was a little different. The crispy taste of that fried dish was really delicious.

"Was that Ojou-sama's invention?"

"Yeah. I didn't tell you that...? Well, I didn't care enough. Whatever."

"No... That's important information!"

I, who was made to see that Ojou-sama might have a lot of appreciation for food, became extremely fired up to make something that she would like. My original purpose has changed somewhat, but I didn't care much about that.

Ronnie folded his arms in front of me while I was getting more and more fired up.

"Ojou-sama likes all sweets."

"Yeah. I've never heard her say she doesn't like something."

"".....""

Discussion finished.

I'm troubled over what my goal has become, but the only thing I've heard Ojou-sama hates is ghost stories. She often eats cakes and chocolates, but I couldn't think of anything to make with those. There are a lot of different types of chocolate sweets, but this mansion served a lot of them.

While I was sunk in my sea of thoughts, Ronnie murmured.

"Ojou-sama likes honey, doesn't she?"

"Honey?"

"She eats a lot of candy, doesn't she? Honey candy."

Now that he mentions it, Ojou-sama does dip something in honey.

In addition to candies, she also combined it with lemons in the laboratory, or smeared it on a baguette and sprinkled with sugar or mixed it with yoghurt.

But it's easier to find sweets made with honey than it is to find sweets made from chocolate. It's expensive, but it isn't served as much as chocolate in this house, and I see it a lot in town.

"Speaking of honey, how about that? I see it sometimes in town, erm... Pancake?"

"Oh, that's delicious if you put honey and butter on it."

And as far as I can see, it doesn't seem like it's tough to make. I might be able to make it. But, when I came up with this good idea, I immediately realised that I couldn't make this.

"... Pancakes won't do. They're delicious fresh. The butter won't melt if it's not fresh and it'll be dry."

"Do you want to surprise Ojou-sama?"

"Yeah."

So, I won't give Ojou-sama something that has to be eaten straight away. If she's full, then the food might not taste good anymore. She might still eat it even if she's bloated, but forcing her to eat it is not what I'm trying to do. I don't want to trouble her when I'm trying to relieve her fatigue.

"Something delicious even when cold... honey..."

"Then, why don't you go to the library?"

"Are there cookbooks in the library?"

Chefs don't learn how to cook in the library. I don't know about other chefs, but that is true for the ones in the mansion.

But Ronnie shook his head.

"No, you're looking for popular sweets, right? You might find a hint if you read people's travel journals. I'm sure they wrote about what souvenirs they bought."

He was reasonable, and I'm strangely impressed.

"Ronnie, you're smart."

“... Thanks.”

Ronnie looked like he had mixed feelings, but this is precious information. I immediately pulled Ronnie and headed to the library.

“Hey, I’ll help you if there’s something that interests you, so there’s no need for me to go to the library too, right?”

“No. I won’t be able to reach books in high places, right?”

To be honest, I could easily get the books if I step on the bookshelf, but then the books and bookshelves would get dirty. But frankly, Ronnie might know something that I don’t just like before, so I also wanted to talk to him more.

“Well, whatever.”

At the end of the day, Ronnie is a good person.

“... What’re you laughing at?”

“If it turns out well then I’ll let you taste it too.”

“Poison tasting...? Fine.”

“Rude.”

I even said if it turns out well, so I can’t just ignore the poison tasting comment. But unfortunately, I couldn’t frankly give him my thanks too. As a result, Ronnie shrugged and said, “I don’t mind.” His face said that he knew that I didn’t want to give something terrible to Ojou-sama. I’m sure of it, but I also want to thank him.

“Sorry.”

“You don’t even know what you’re apologising for!”

“No, I do. I know.”

He said as he patted my head and all I could do is sigh. I really wanted to curse him, but I think it would be childish of me to do so. I couldn’t waste the things I learned in Aisha-sensei’s lectures.

We entered the library. “It’s probably around here,” Ronnie said, and I started pulling the books out one after another. I carefully turned the pages and searched to see if there was any information on speciality products and food.

“You’ve gotten considerably fast at reading.”

“I studied.”

Even if I couldn’t write before, I could read. And if I studied every day, then my reading speed would get faster. I could read quickly now thanks to Ojou-sama and Ronnie, but it’s embarrassing to be praised for it. So, I forced myself to remain calm and continued to read the travel journals. But I couldn’t find the information I wanted even after the first, second and third book. Eventually, Ronnie

said, "I'll try looking in folkloristics. You can call me if there's a book out of your reach," and left. But there were still a lot of travel journals here, so I continued to read them one after the other.

I couldn't find the information I wanted, but the travel journals were full of exciting entries. I've never travelled before, but I feel like I've been to the places I read about. But I couldn't understand some of the things that were written down, so I would like to go there and see it for myself. I want to go there someday, but I wonder if I ever will?

While I was reading the journals, an entry about preserved food caught my eye.

"... A preserved food made from dairy by the nomadic tribes?"

I thought about cheese when I saw the words preserved food made from dairy, but the description of it seemed somewhat different from cheese. Ojou-sama also eats dairy products so my knowledge of it might be useful to her even if it's not sweet. I read the sentence.

"Nomadic sweets... Boiled milk?"

The recipe says to mix milk and sugar in a large pot and simmer it. Then you get a coloured lump, you cut that and then eat it...

"..."

Is this yummy?

It might be the same as simmering hot milk because it uses milk and sugar. Since it says preserved food, it doesn't seem like you have to eat it straight away.

"Lara? Did you find anything good?"

"I found something, but I don't really understand it."

Honestly, I couldn't imagine what it tastes like. I showed Ronnie the page when he approached me, and he looked a little surprised.

"I see. This looks useful."

"Do you know it?"

"It's caramel sauce. If you simmer it more then it becomes solid. It melts in your mouth like candy. It makes you thirsty, but it's delicious."

"..."

"Oh, this one also has honey, so you can carry out your original goal."

Ronnie has a good palate. People have different preferences for food, but I've never heard anyone say something tastes bad if Ronnie says it tastes good; so I think it's tasty.

But I didn't want to present Ojou-sama with something that I've never eaten before. I should try it, but it's a waste of ingredients.

"Do you want to try it? You've never eaten it before right?"

“... I haven’t.”

Why does he always know what I’m thinking? I thought when Ronnie made that remark. But when I looked at him, I realised that he hadn’t said that because of how I looked; he was just staring at the book.

“The measurements are written down, but that’s the units they use. Hold on, I’ll calculate it for you.”

“Then, I’ll go get the ingredients while you do that. What do I need?”

“Just milk, butter, honey and sugar for now. I think you could make it with fresh cream too, but it says milk here.”

“Okay. Can we make it in the laboratory?”

“Yeah, it only requires a pot.”

I rushed to the kitchen after I heard his answer. Even though I was getting ingredients, the food here is managed, so I had to purchase it. Luckily, I could get an invoice, so I didn’t need to pay for it now. Sometimes, people ask for little things like fruit, so they’re flexible. It’s usually impossible to get fruit if you don’t request it beforehand, but they should have plenty of stock for the ingredients I want right now. The chef immediately gave me the ingredients.

I carried the basket with the ingredients and a milk bottle to the laboratory and Ronnie was already there.

“Then, let’s make it.”

He said, as he took out a pot.

“The quantity is written here, so let’s put it all in. Use this scale.”

“Okay. I just have to stir it?”

“Yeah. You just have to keep stirring.”

What should I do if it turns out bad? I worried, but Ronnie uttered while looking at the milk, “You can still make it many times even if you fail,” so I was secretly relieved. It seems like it’ll be fine even if I fail.

I turned on the fire and stirred it, so the milk doesn’t burn. I mixed it around in a circle. I didn’t do anything but stir.

“It’s still watery, even though you’re stirring this much. Doesn’t it seem burnt?”

“I don’t know. I don’t want to fail. It’ll be fine if I stir.”

“But your arm hurts, don’t they?”

“It’s a gift for Ojou-sama. I’m fine.”

I don't know what to do with the failed product if it does get burnt. I was afraid of that and kept on stirring, while being nervous, and Ronnie laughed in amusement.



“Ojou-sama will be happy.”

“... I hope so.”

“But I wonder if I should do something, since you’re trying so hard.”

Ronnie said, as he took some almonds from the cupboard. Then he chopped them up with his magic.

“What’re you doing? Isn’t that Ojou-sama’s?”

“It’s fine, she said we could eat it. I think it’ll be delicious if you add this into the second batch.”

It does certainly seem like it would be tasty because of the texture changes. Well, if Ojou-sama said it was fine, then it’s probably alright. Either way, I’ll put the almonds into the next batch. For now, all I could do was pray for the success of the first batch.

Then, silence reigned for a while and then Ronnie spoke.

“... How were the travel journals?”

“Huh? They were interesting. It made me want to travel someday.”

I hadn’t expected Ronnie’s question, and I got a bit excited when I remembered the journals. I have a lot of money because I saved it, so I should have a lot of funds for travelling, and I should be able to take time off. Experiencing a lot of different things in the first place I go to is very enticing.

I want to travel, but I don’t want to leave Ojou-sama’s side for a long time.

“Then should I tell Ojou-sama? I’ll ask her, ‘why don’t you bring Lara with you the next time you go to Ertiga?’”

“Eh? That’s so brazen! Even Emina doesn’t go with her!”

I turned back in a panic, and Ronnie laughed.

“Then you can come up with an excuse. You can say you’re guarding her after you’ve learnt defensive combat.”

“...”

Apparently, he was just enticing me. But I didn’t have any reason to refuse Ronnie’s suggestion. Honestly, I was kind of looking forward to it.

But, that feeling didn’t last long. *There must be a reason for why Master instructed Ronnie to teach Ojou-sama defensive combat as well, and not just me.* I finally realised that.

“...”

But Ronnie hadn’t said anything, so he was probably just preparing me for now. Even though I had caused an explosion today, I won’t be useful if I don’t get to a combat level.

“... I’ll study properly next time!”

“Hey, don’t swing the spatula around!”

If I knew that a little earlier, then I might have been more focused today! I could only make excuses.

I'll do it properly next time. But right now, I have to make the perfect caramel. While I thought that, the milk started to condense.

"Apparently... You scoop it with the spatula until you can see the bottom and then let it cool."

"Like this...?"

I was certainly scooping it, but I felt like it could get harder. *But is it no good if it's too hard?* But there's nothing else written about it in the book.

"Even if you fail, it's become caramel sauce. Isn't it fine to eat it by dipping food in?"

"Yo-you're right!"

I'm a little nervous, but I poured them into square moulds. The surface of the moulds was coated with magic, so it's easy to peel the caramels off once it's cooled. But the moulds will become iron again if I don't apply magic to it after I use it. After they'd cooled down, I put the moulds into a mini refrigerator.

"I wonder if it'll be done once it cools completely."

Ronnie said as he scooped the leftover caramel in the pot with his finger and put it in his mouth.

"Yup, it'll probably be delicious."

"What do you mean probably?"

"Well, I just thought it'll be delicious if it cools a bit more."

I shrugged at Ronnie. Judging from how Ronnie was acting, I've made something that Ojou-sama will be happy to eat.

"Say, Ronnie. You have time while we wait for it to cool right?"

"Yeah?"

"Defensive combat. Teach it to me."

"... We can do that tomorrow, right?"

"Argh! Why're you like this?!"

Even though I'm motivated!

I was going to protest, but Ronnie sighed as if he was giving up.

"I'm joking. I thought you wouldn't ask, and I don't want you to cause any explosions."

"I won't!"

"I know. I know."

Do you really know...? But it was no use questioning him any further.

Because we're wasting time!

“We'll wrap it up when the caramel's finished.”

“I know! I want Ojou-sama to say, ‘It's delicious’ to the first sweets I've ever made!”

I decided that Ronnie had to try the finished product because he had said it was ‘probably delicious’ earlier.

Epilogue: A Gift for You

[Gille/Sylvester's Perspective]

When the articles about the Founding Festival had disappeared from the newspaper, I finally found some spare time. *At last*, I thought, as I invited Vernoux.

“Vernoux, do you want to go to town?”

“Town? Ok, but are we going to tell Clay before we go?”

“I wanted to return before he notices that we’re gone.”

Clay’s crisis management skills and adherence to his principles are great, but I needed time as 『Gille』. *As promised, I behaved myself during the Founding Festival, so I want him to overlook this, ——* I thought, but I had a feeling that he would scold me if he found out I was sneaking out.

I felt bad for doing this to him, but I really wanted to go out now that I have time.

Of course, I wanted to see the town since I haven’t been in a long time, but I have a goal.

It’s nearly Dilly’s birthday, so I really want to find her birthday gift.

Vernoux had never cared about Dilly’s birthday before, so I don’t know the exact date.

However, Dilly’s real name is 『Cordelia Enna Pameradia』.

Since her middle name was 『Enna』, her birthday should be in three to twenty days. A lot of people didn’t have middle names, but those who did had the name of the guardian deity related to their birth date, so I shouldn’t be wrong.

I hadn’t noticed that because I had such a strong impression of the words 『Cordelia』, 『Dilly』 and 『Pameradia』, but I regretted that I missed the chance to send her a gift on her birthday as soon as I noticed that fact.

“Let’s go.”

“Thanks.”

Vernoux seemed hesitant, but his expression said, ‘We probably won’t be caught’. And he probably didn’t care if he got scolded.

When Vernoux walked to where I was standing, he put his hand on my shoulder and muttered. I couldn’t hear what he was saying, but it was magic spoken in the ancient language, passed down in the Flantheim House. I could tell that his magic was gently covering me. My hair had probably changed from black to a lighter colour.

I was good at sneaking out of the castle, so I went with Vernoux and snuck out with my mask. Luckily, only Vernoux and Dilly knew about my mask. Since no one else knew about it, I could easily hide my presence with my magic.

We arrived in town and went straight to a deserted alley. I took off the mask and put it in my bag so that no one would find it.

“Have you decided where you want to go?”

“Yeah. Kind of. I’m interested in some stores.”

“Then, let’s go there.”

I also got Vernoux’s permission, so I headed to a store without hesitation.

But I couldn’t find what I wanted, even after visiting two shops. Then, at the third store.

“I feel like she’d demand I write letters to her if I give her stationary.”

“... No, she won’t.”

What’s nice? I ended up in a corner lined with various papers while I was looking around.

“Having said that, a birthday card would become useless later...”

“Well, you don’t need it anymore after you’ve read it once.”

“I hope I find something that suits her....”

“Anyway, should we change stores?”

Vernoux replied in a flat voice when I spoke to him, but it seemed like he couldn’t stand it anymore, so he concluded the conversation.

Actually, we also left the first and second stores because Vernoux had said that then too... I tilted my head when he said that to me the third time.

“Is something wrong?”

“No, I think it’s amazing how you could calmly search through this store. We’re getting a lot of attention.”

People were certainly staring at us a fair bit, but it was nothing compared to the attention I get when I act as the Prince.

And Vernoux had said, “This store,” but it was just a regular store. It was a bit different from the stores I usually frequent with Vernoux, because it was aimed towards women, and the interior was pink and orange. So, I thought I would find something that Dilly would like... But Vernoux looked really uncomfortable.

“... Mm, I’ve looked around, but nothing stands out.”

“Ok. So, let’s leave.”

I feel incredibly disappointed, but there’s nothing I can do if I can’t find something to give her. Vernoux smiled a little impatiently and gave a big sigh when we left the store.

“... Gille, are you really fine with that room?”

“That’s why I asked you about what’s troubling you.”

“Rather than troubled... you normally wouldn’t be able to stay calm in a room full of stuffed animals and lace, right.”

“Hmm? Well, I am looking for something that Dilly would like.”

Does Vernoux have another good idea? Vernoux shook his head as if he was tired.

“No, never mind.”

“It seems like you’re not understanding something.”

“I don’t, but I felt like I had to reply because it’s you.”

“Hm?”

He really didn’t understand my reasoning, but it looked like he wanted to.

“The baked goods from the corner store is your treat today, Gille.”

“Yeah, alright. Shall we go there now?”

“Sure. I want to take a break too.”

He was accompanying me right now on my incognito trip, so I didn’t mind treating him to sweets.

I was worried that I still hadn’t found a present for her, but I was hungry too, so we headed to the sweets store that Vernoux wanted to eat at.

The baked goods at the very end of the street were hard and weren’t served at the castle. Vernoux and I were both surprised when we had first eaten there, but we got addicted to them and got them every time we got out to town.

The clerk put the sweet halfway into the bag, and we sat on a bench. Then we watched people walking through the streets as we ate. It had a simple taste, so I would probably eat a lot if it were a bit softer.

“I’m thirsty.”

“Me too. Let’s go to the next place.”

There were a lot of stores at the bazaar lined with fruits and one which squeezed them into juice. That store was our aim. We started walking again.

On the way there, Vernoux suddenly asked.

“Say, I want to ask you... Who’re you sending that gift as?”

“Huh?”

“Are you sending it as 『Gille』 ? Or your real name?”

I gasped.

As Gille or as Sylvester?

“The answer’s obvious. I’m sending it as 『Gille』.”

The answer would be different if he’d asked me who I wanted to send the gift as, but the answer to that question was already set. I couldn’t send her a gift as Sylvester. Dilly would definitely be puzzled.

“That’s tough. You too, you can just tell her already. It’s been four years, right?”

Vernoux said, when we got to the bazaar and paid for the juice. He had said it so easily, but it was a difficult thing for me to do.

“I would if I knew the reason why she was avoiding me.”

I had no idea what she hated about me. It wasn’t like I’ve never thought about telling her when writing to her. But I could never write it when I thought about how our relationship might end because of it. And the fact that she dislikes people who lie has become a dead weight for me.

“Honestly, you’re so negative. You love her, don’t you?”

Vernoux always makes positive suggestions, I thought, but I didn’t know how to reply. Especially towards that question.

“... Probably.”

I stayed quiet for a while before answering, and Vernoux blinked a few times.

“Hah? Oh, what? You’re saying that now?”

“I mean, I probably do. If I didn’t then I probably wouldn’t sneak out into town to buy her a gift. But I’ve never felt like this about anyone else before, so I have nothing to compare this feeling with.”

Therefore, probably.

I couldn’t think of any other suitable words to say. It’s probably because I’m trying to become an adult whose worthy of her. But I’m not confident enough.

“You’re sweeter than I thought. Are you trying to give me heartburn?”

“Are you eating too many sweets? Should I prescribe you some stomach medicine?”

“I’m telling you that’s not it. Well, I do appreciate your feelings though.”

Vernoux made a grand gesture in disappointment, but I didn’t know what it meant. Vernoux spoke like that sometimes, but I wished he would just be frank.

“But, love or not...?”

“What?”

“If I knew why she was avoiding me and fixed it... I’m still worried about a lot of things. And my future will probably be decided depending on the situation.”

Even if I could talk to her normally as myself, Dilly would probably be annoyed if 『Sylvester』 chased after a certain lady. Then she would probably avoid me again before we even become friends. To begin

with, depending on the situation of the kingdom, I'm in a position where I have a lot of marriage proposals from ladies both inside and outside of the kingdom. I thought. Aren't my thoughts getting a bit out of hand? I reflected. *What's the point of thinking about marriage proposals?*

"I was wondering what you'd say... But what's the point of saying such trivial things?"

"Trivial, you say..."

"How the situation turns out doesn't matter. You and your father are the ones who decide how the situation will go. Everyone worries about their future."

"But..."

"Don't make such an irritating face in this peaceful world. You just have to think about how you'll use us. You're really stupid."

Vernoux said and laughed.

"Am I wrong?"

"... Nope."

I was at a loss for words because he'd refused. But this was too different from my thoughts, so I couldn't say anything to agree with him.

"What? You want to refuse?"

"No... Oh, but is there anything you're worried about Vernoux?"

I have to answer. The answer I'd replied with after much thought sounded as if I was trying to distract him. But Vernoux was good at not breaking his expression.

"Oh, I do. I'm worried about what kind of long lecture Clay will give us once we return."

"Haha, that's a serious matter."

I burst into laughter because Vernoux had said something that shouldn't have been spoken. Vernoux had never listened to Clay's lectures seriously, so there's no way he would be worried about them.

"I'll have to learn how to dodge the subject like you, Vernoux."

"I'm always honest?"

"Ah, thanks. So could I say something else?"

"Yeah, if you want to vent then vent away. I'm sick of this heavy mood."

Vernoux, who joked, was really reliable.

"To tell you the truth, I want to meet her more as 『Gille』. I could learn more things about her by talking with her, face to face, which I wouldn't be able to learn no matter how many letters we send to each other. And her response time would be faster."

I also want her to know more about me, and I also want to know more about her.

“... Well, there are some things you could say because you can’t see the person. Letters aren’t bad either, are they?”

“How unusual. I can’t believe you’re consoling me.”

I smiled wryly at Vernoux, who had probably said that since he knew I was envious of him. *I have such a good friend. He’s encouraging me even though he usually doesn’t do this.*

But Vernoux looked serious.

“Well, I’m just pitying you.”

“...”

Apparently, he wasn’t comforting me. Those were his true feelings. If possible, I wanted him to let me think that he was comforting me. If I had to be direct, I would say that my damage has increased.

Although, I do feel a bit lighter now that I’ve said it.

“We’re already here, so why don’t we go see the stalls? Last time I also bought something interesting from there right?”

“Oh... Sure. The stalls are much better than those stores.”

Vernoux agreed with me, so I looked around the stalls. I found a lot of things that interested me, but I kept telling myself that I was buying a gift for Dilly today, so I moved as quickly as I could.

Not that, or this. While thinking so, I arrived at the stall where I bought the mask.

The seller looked up and lightly lifted his right arm.

“Yo, Chibis. You’re here again?”

“Yes. Do you have any more unusual items?”

“I brought a lot of glass products with me today... But don’t break them okay?”

The seller looked healthy with his tanned skin. He grinned showing his white teeth. His smile could also be interpreted as ‘you break it you pay’. He probably valued his goods a lot.

“I’ll be careful.”

“A’ite. Well, I don’t have to worry about you breaking it since it’s you Chibis.”

I shifted my eyes to the glass products after the seller made his comment. There was a paperweight with a hole to insert things into, and pen stands. There were a variety of products lined up, but one caught my eye.

“This is... an ornament based on a brush?”

“Oh, that’s a glass pen. It’s a rare item in this kingdom, but you can write with this glass pen.”

“Glass pen?”

I repeated the words I’ve never heard before, and the seller looked at me and held the pen.

“There’s a slit in the nib, right? When you soak the nib in ink, the ink flows through this slit. Once you fill it, you could write half the page or a full page. It’s not bad as decoration either.”

“It’s beautiful.”

“You’re observing the pink one. Is it a gift for a girl? That glass pen comes with a cute pen stand. But well, if you want to buy both, then the price isn’t going to be pretty.”

The owner put up his thumb and index finger while saying this. *I see. It really will be expensive. But it’s only expensive when you compare it to feathered pens. It’s not something that I can’t buy. I probably don’t have to worry about Dilly refusing it because it’s too expensive.*

“How does it write?”

“Do you want to try it? The glass pens are handmade, so the pens each have different thicknesses.”

The seller said as he took out an ink bottle and paper. And, when he dipped the nib into the ink, the ink was sucked up vigorously along the slit. He ran the nib along the edges of the bottle and then gave me the pen-holder.

“Well, I think my artisans make all of them easy to write with.”

“Thank you.”

I wrote with the pen, and it was certainly like the seller had said. The pen smoothly slid on top of the paper, and it felt light as I wrote. The pen-holder also had an ornament on it, but it was created so that the ornament was easy to hold.

“It looks good. You like it too don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

Vernoux, who was watching the interaction between the seller and me, said and nodded.

Dilly doesn’t come to places like this, so she probably doesn’t know that items like this exist. She would probably accept this beautiful pen which was easy to write with.

“Fancy brats. Do you want to try the other pens?”

“Yes please.”

As the seller said, the glass pens were all unique, and I want to give Dilly the one which was most comfortable to write with. Just because I think this one is easy to write with doesn’t mean that Dilly would feel the same, and it’ll probably be better for me to choose a pen with similar thickness to the ones she uses.

“You can clean the ink if you run the glass pens under water, so it’s easy to change the colour of the ink.”

When I heard that, I remembered that she had a lot of coloured ink and secretly rejoiced because it was becoming the perfect gift.

I tried different pens and then handed the seller one.

“Can I get this?”

The pen tip was clear, and the pen-holder was light red. Some people might even consider it a shade of pink. 『Cordelia』 was also a red rose, and the thickness of the lines was just right.

“There are grooves on the pen-holder, so it’s slippery.”

“It’s easy for me to use, so I hope it is for her as well.”

“You don’t have to worry about that with a product from my stall.”

“Gahaha,” the seller laughed heartily as he carefully put the pen into a case.

“It comes with a pen stand, do you want it?”

“Can I see it first?”

“See, this one.”

The pen-stand probably looked good with the pen since it was a set. But I wanted to know if it was something I wanted to give to Dilly. The seller showed me the pen-stand, and I knew with a glance that it was made with that glass pen in mind.

“It’s beautiful.”

“I thought it would catch your attention Chibi. But, well... Have you already used up your present budget?”

“Do you have anything else?”

“I have an ink jar. Well, it’s more expensive than the pen, so you probably have to talk to your parents and check your budget.”

“Ink jar?”

“It’s over there. There are quite a few novelty ones. Do you want to see them?”

The seller took some white boxes out from behind him and took out the contents one by one.

The ink jar was slightly pink. The glass was thick, and a flower was engraved on the front. The lid was shaped like a flower. It was an elaborate item. I think it would suit Dilly, but I couldn’t make a decision straight away.

“I think she’ll probably put blue ink in there, so I think it would be better if the colour stands out more than the ink...”

Sometimes she wrote with sepia or green, but blue was probably her favourite.

The pen-holder was coloured, but the tip was clear, so she probably didn’t have to worry about which colour was on the pen.

But this jar was pink. It’s beautiful and rare, but I didn’t know if the colour would stand out once the ink was put inside.

“Then, how about this one? It’s made with a transparent layer and a decorative layer. Apparently, the artisan came up with this item while gazing at the sea. He made it represent the waves and the fishes.”

“That’s cool.”

“Isn’t it?”

“But I want something with flowers. The girl likes flowers.”

It’s a nice item if I were to use it and I think Dilly would like it too. But still, Dilly gives off the impression that she really likes flowers. *Isn’t there something that she would really like?* I couldn’t help but think.

“If you want one with flowers then I have others. If you want a coloured ink jar, then how about this one? It’s a bit greenish and feels like the forest, right?”

“Mm, I didn’t say she likes forest. Wait, no she might...”

“Then-,” the seller and I looked for a different ink jar, but Vernoux, who was standing next to me, picked up a jar.

“Isn’t it better to give her a simple and clear coloured ink jar? The gold line doesn’t look bad, and you don’t have to pick a pen to suit it.”

The ink jar that Vernoux chose was exquisite. It was simple, but made out of frosted glass and engraved with a flower. It looked like it would suit any ink colour and pen. There was a thin gold line around the mouth of the jar, and I could still see the line even though the lid was closed.

“... It’s lovely.”

“Don’t look mixed if you’re going to compliment it. I can tell you want to choose it yourself.”

“No, you can’t.”

“Yes, I can.”

Vernoux pointed this out, but I insisted that I didn’t. The ink jar that Vernoux had chosen was gorgeous and would suit Dilly. I’m looking for something that would make her happy so this would do. *This is the only one that would make her happy*, of course, I would choose this jar. But, I can’t say that I didn’t want to pick it myself.

“Then, this and that. I’ll wrap it for you. I’ll give you a bit of a discount since you’re buying them together.”

“Thanks.”

The seller was a little rude as he carefully tied a ribbon onto the box. The appearance of him tying the ribbon didn’t match his image. He had tied the ribbon into a flower because I’d said that Dilly liked flowers.

I paid for it and put it into my bag.

I’m so glad I found a good present. I thought, and the seller grinned.

“Chibi, you should remember what this flower means in the language of flowers if you want to give it as a gift.”

“Language of flowers? Oh yeah, what flower is this?”

I didn’t care much since I thought it was pretty, but it was a flower I wasn’t familiar with.

“This flower’s called Kikyo [1].”

“Kikyo... It sounds a little strange, doesn’t it?”

“Apparently the roots could be used as medicine. Anyway, the language of flowers. It’s just right for you right now, isn’t it?”

I was worried because the seller’s face said he wanted to tease me. I became anxious because he looked like he was putting on airs. *Irritating*, I thought as I stared at him and waited for an answer.

“In the language of flowers, it means 『honesty』 and 『endless love』 . It’s nice, right?”

I had certainly heard his words, but my brain couldn’t keep up.

Huh?

But, Vernoux, who was next to me, burst into laughter.

“Mister, those words don’t match you.”

“What’re you saying? Those words suit me more than anyone, right?”

The two had fun joking around, but I couldn’t join in. Instead, my face turned red.



No, Dilly probably won't notice the meaning of the flower.

The seller had said that a trait of Kikyo, which couldn't be found in this kingdom, is that it could be made into medicine, he never said that it's a flower with a strong scent. So, I'd like to think that the chances of Dilly knowing this flower are very low... Or perhaps, this flower has a strong scent?

But I want to give her this gift no matter what Kikyo meant in the language of flowers. It wasn't like it's a bad meaning. There's no use worrying over it.

But on the other hand, I also wanted her to notice this a bit and know how I feel. I didn't intend to say this, but my redness wouldn't go away now that I thought about it.

I'm going to write her a letter along with the present. Can I write properly and hide my restlessness?

I covered my face because it seemed like I was going to have a rough time. And, I couldn't help but think that I would always be at the mercy of anything involving Dilly.

But I really did want to congratulate her, and I sincerely hoped that she would get it.

Even if the letter becomes hard to write and I only manage to write 'Happy Birthday', I think that my desire of wanting to congratulate her won't lose to anyone.

Besides... I'm sure that I would regret it if I don't congratulate her, since I'll be seeing her soon.

At the end of the Founding Festival, ——we'll be going to visit the Green Witch, my sensei in medicinal herbs. She has a lot of medicinal herbs and books about medicinal herbs. I'm sure Dilly will like it. And I'm sure Sensei will like Dilly too.

And, —— I hoped that I would be able to talk to her a lot more than I could at the evening party.

Act 31: A Present and an Invitation

A month had passed since the Founding Festival and the counterfeit flora silk incident.

It's finally time for my house arrest to end. I can finally go horse riding ——— the day Cordelia thought that, a package was delivered to her.

She took the package to her laboratory and opened it, then laughed a little.

“It’s a prototype of the soap I asked the Eris Firm to make.”

She’d come up with soap carving when she had stayed at her friend’s, Hazel Hale, house before the Founding Festival, so she asked the Eris Firm for soap. Her order was 『a soft soap which could be carved with a lady’s hands』. If things went well, she wanted to turn it into a hobby for noble ladies, so the price didn’t matter. The Eris Firm came up with a new formula for soap in response to Cordelia’s wish and sent it to her.

“Is that from my house? I thought it would take them a bit longer to send it to you, since you’d requested it during the Founding Festival.”

Ronnie the magician, the third son of the Eris Firm, looked at Cordelia strangely as she picked up the soap.

“Yeah. I also thought that... But I’m grateful that they’d finished it this fast.”

“I knew they would finish it fast, because they want to be on friendly terms with the Earl’s house, but the Founding Festival is their busiest period. I’m honestly surprised.”

Cordelia lightly agreed with him, “Yeah.” But Ronnie looked dubious.

“Ojou-sama, don’t tell me you offered them some kind of deal?”

“I didn’t? I only told them that I would help them add fragrances to the soap if I like it.”

“I knew it. That’s a really enticing deal.”

Ronnie looked shocked, but Cordelia wanted to secure routes to distribute goods in the future. *How efficiently can I distribute my weapon, 『aromas』?* Ensuring the blueprints for setting up aromas as a representative industry of Pameradia fief is currently an important task.

“You shouldn’t use my family’s firm all the time... Hey, didn’t I tell you that before?”

“Before you gave me advice and told me that I should get a quote from various places. But don’t worry; do I seem naïve to you?”

Cordelia said, a little jokingly, and Ronnie grunted for a while.

“I can’t say that you’re not naïve. But, well, you won’t make a loss.”

Is he complimenting me or not? No, he’s probably just saying what he’s thinking. Ronnie’s too honest... His parents would get angry if they saw how he was acting just a second ago.

Cordelia thought as she picked up the soaps one by one. *They feel nice, and I'm looking forward to seeing how well they carve.*

"I don't understand why someone would want to carve soap. It's fine as long as you can use it."

"That may certainly be true for you, Ronnie. But they're going to be made into ornaments, so they can't be measured by their personal uses alone, you know? Well, I still don't know whether they'll become a trend or not..."

"I like to eat things more than I like to look at things."

I definitely couldn't picture Ronnie carving something small, but he is skilful and accurate with his hands, so I think it's a waste that his personality and aptitude don't match. He might really like it if he tries it once, but it's hard to get him to try.

"What do you like to do, Ronnie?"

"Me? I like to relax and do nothing."

Ronnie's reply was the same as always, and Cordelia smiled wryly.

"I'm sure most people like to do that."

"Huh? Really? Aren't you the type of person who thinks it's a waste of time to relax and do nothing, Ojou-sama? And Master definitely wouldn't sit around and do nothing."

"....."

That's not true...! She couldn't say that.

I don't hate being lazy, but I don't remember ever being lazy since I was born into this world.

I do rest. But sitting around and doing nothing... For example, I've never just laid in bed for a whole day unless I was sick. But what's harder to imagine is Otou-sama being lazy.

(... But I do spend time on my hobbies and rest.)

That's right, so there shouldn't be a problem.

"Why don't you try being lazy for a day, Ojou-sama?"

"Mm... I'm going to tackle today's plan so that I can sit around and do nothing someday."

For a second, she'd thought *if it's just for one day...* but she quickly changed her mind, *no, I have so much to do. The things I'm doing today are things I like to do. I know it'll bug me to be in the middle of something if I laze around.*

(Right now, I want to try and carve this soap, and I want to make progress on the insurance regime.)

And I have other important things I have to do too. Cordelia thought, as she looked at the bunch of paperwork that emerged from under the soap and laughed.

"Ronnie, good news. It looks like Eris Firm is reacting positively to my plan of building a herb garden near Ertiga."

“Oh... They finished the soaps early because they wanted to give you this reply.”

Ronnie shrugged his shoulders because he finally knew why they'd sent the soap so fast.

“Eris Firm is quite big in the area south of the Royal Capital, but they aren't in the Pameradia fief. They want to gain a foothold by getting along with the Earl's family. It would be easy for them to gain the trust of the people if they trade with the Earl's family. It's a give and take situation.”

“Um, I have to report the progress to Otou-sama. Oh yes, also, since they're already working on soap, I think I'll ask them to work on detergent too. Then everyone in charge of laundry will be happy, right?”

“The servants in charge of laundry would definitely be happy if the clothes get heavily stained. I think it's a great idea.”

We heard a knock at the door while we were talking.

“Ojou-sama, it's Lara.”

“Come in.”

As soon as she'd heard Cordelia's reply, Lara, the small apprentice girl, swung the door open without making any noise.

“What's wrong? Why are you in such a rush?”

“Ojou-sama, the Flantheim House's young master is here. And Ronnie, run away.”

I see. Lara came to warn Ronnie since he didn't have good manners. Lara does give Ronnie sharp retorts sometimes, but it's lovely to see that she's worried about him.

“Then, see you.”

“I'll be taking my leave.”

Lara pulled on Ronnie's robes and pestered him, “And I want you to teach me something!” *Friendship is so beautiful*, Cordelia thought as she wrapped the soaps up and put them in the cupboard in preparation for Vernoux's invasion.

Shortly after that, Emina, the maid, showed Vernoux to the room.

“How are you, Vernoux-sama?”

“Not bad. But I might feel a lot better if you prepared some sweets. I want to eat something sweet and sour today.”

He said as he glanced at Emina, who smiled gently and said, “Then, I'll prepare some,” then she left the room.

“You really like the sweets at my house. Are you looking forward to the tea?”

“I certainly do, but I have two errands today.”

“Errands?”

“The first errand is about the schedule adjustment. Gille said he would be visiting the 『Green Witch』 in 5 days, how does your schedule look?”

“He’s visiting his sensei’s place, right?”

The Green Witch was the original owner of the aloe vera that Cordelia was raising in the greenhouse. She had heard from Gille, before the Founding Festival, that the Green Witch knew a lot about plants and that Gille and Vernoux visited her often. She was glad that she wasn’t on house arrest anymore, and the invitation had come at such a perfect time.

“Well, he probably wrote about it in this letter, so just let me know your reply.”

“Thank you... And this package?”

The letter that Vernoux held was accompanied by a slightly larger package.

Cordelia tilted her head in curiosity, and Vernoux replied, “This is my 2nd errand.”

“It’s a present from Gille. It’s your birthday soon, right?”

“Oh my.”

“He said he didn’t know the actual date, though. He couldn’t narrow down the exact date with just the name 『Enna』 after all.”

Cordelia’s official name was 『Cordelia Enna Pameradia』. 『Enna』 is the name of the guardian deity related to her birthdate. Guardian deities were like the star signs of her old world, and each one cut off at certain dates; so, you could guess someone’s birth date within a certain period but not the specific date. Nowadays, these middle names were added to noble child who had suffered from a major illness at a young age, but she never imagined that someone would send her a birthday present because of her middle name.

(And, the fact that he knows my middle name is 『Enna』 ... means that Gille-sama knows my real name and that I’m the daughter of Earl Pameradia.)

She wasn’t hiding her own lineage. Vernoux had introduced her as 『Dilly』, so she just left it like that. He knew that she had an environment in which she would cultivate aloe vera, so it wouldn’t be strange for him to find out that she was the daughter of Earl Pameradia, since they were the only house that had a private greenhouse. If not, then he had probably heard about it from Vernoux, since they were close, so she wasn’t worried.

Yes, so I don’t care if he knows but...

“What’s wrong? You’re making a strange face.”

“Nothing. I just remembered that I’ve never sent Gille-sama a birthday present before...”

It was nice to have a friend who would celebrate your birthday. But even though she’d never asked his birthday before, she felt bad for not even thinking about it. However, Vernoux quickly said, “Oh, you don’t have to worry about that. Gille also didn’t send you a present until this year. You can think about it next year.”

“Which means that his birthday has already passed this year, right? So then, may I ask you when his birthday is?”

“Oh... I’ll tell you after I ask him.”

“...”

Vernoux averted her gaze. *Did he really forget, or had he never asked before? In any case, I feel like I know why he said, ‘that’.*

“... Vernoux-sama, you don’t remember his birthday, do you?”

“No, I can’t say it.”

“...”

Well, you wouldn’t be able to say it if you don’t remember it. Cordelia was speechless, but in a sense, like Vernoux, she didn’t care.

“Anyway, Dilly. Can you open the present?”

“I really want to open it... But you’re here.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I feel like you’re going to tease me no matter how I react.”

So, I want to open it slowly when I’m alone. But, Vernoux made a grand gesture in response.

“I thought I would report back to Gille since he was worried if you would like it or not.”

“...”

Is that really all? But I don’t remember him lying to me before. But he did dodge topics and hide his real intentions.

(But there’s no point in him hiding his real intentions... I guess I could open it if Gille-sama is worried.)

Cordelia also wanted to see what was inside. She believed Vernoux and slowly opened the package.

There were two boxes inside of the package, one of which was a red jewellery case. Cordelia gasped.

No way, jewels? A necklace?

That’s too expensive. What the heck is in here...? She timidly peeked inside and saw a glass pen inside.

“Wow, it’s beautiful.”

Even she knew that she was blown away by this present because she couldn’t help but utter those words. She had never seen stationery like this before. *Is the ink inside, or do I actually dip it in ink before I write?*

“Apparently, you can write a lot after you dip it in ink once.”

“Wow, is it really alright for me to use this?!”

“Yeah.”

“It’s really nice.”

I feel motivated just by holding it. I’m looking forward to using this.

“I’m glad that you like it, but can you open that too?”

“Sorry, it’s just really nice.”

I hadn’t forgotten about the other present, I just couldn’t help but be fascinated by the pen. Cordelia put the glass pen back into the jewellery box and opened the other box.

This box was white, and there was cushioning inside. She carefully took the cushioning materials out and saw an ink jar. The ink jar was simple, but well-made and was designed with a kikyō.

“Wow! This is also lovely. I can’t wait to put ink inside.”

“I thought you’d say that!”

She was bothered by Vernoux’s strange pride, but he probably knew what was inside, so she didn’t question him any further.

“I might as well use this pen to write my reply.”

“Yeah, that’ll make him happy too. But read the letter before you reply.”

Cordelia quickly picked up the letter as prompted by Vernoux and read it.

『Happy birthday. I actually wanted to tell you these words directly, but that’s a bit difficult, so I entrusted this to Vernoux. I would be happy if you like your presents, but I’m nervous.

I’ll be visiting the Sensei I told you about in 5 days. If possible, would you also like to come? Sensei is also looking forward to meeting you. I’m sure it’ll be great.』

She read up until there and looked at Vernoux.

“Vernoux-sama, about this letter…”

“Mm?”

“Did you take the letter away from him again while he was writing?”

The last few sentences seemed rushed compared to his gentle writing at the beginning. The way it was rushed looked like how students in my previous life would panic near the end of a test, and quickly scribble their answers onto their worksheets. That was what it looked like. I’m sure he made Gille-sama rush the letter. She thought, and Vernoux replied as if there was nothing wrong.

“Well, he wrote it over and over again, so I told him that was enough. He wrote what he wanted to say, right?”

“I feel bad for him, please stop.”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? I’m the one who’s delivering the letters after all.”

No, it's not.

Couldn't he at least tell Gille-sama how much time he had left to write the letter? But he probably wouldn't get it if Vernoux-sama told him that. Cordelia wasn't worried about how the letter looked, but she was worried about Gille. But she might worry even more if he were to write 『Don't worry』.

“... I wonder if I shouldn't broach this.”

“Whatever's fine, but can you write if you're free in 5 days?”

“Yes, I'm sure it's fine. I'll write the reply... while we're eating sweets.”

A well-timed knock sounded at the door, and Emina appeared with lemon tarts on a cart.

Then, Vernoux, who had been waiting for the sweets, immediately, yet gracefully, gobbled up the tart that was served to him. Then, he went for a second serving without hesitation.

Cordelia ate more slowly than Vernoux as she asked Emina to prepare her some paper and ink. She wasn't sure which ink to put into the ink jar but decided to choose the blue-black ink which she used frequently.

“Are you going to write it now? Then I'll have another slice while I wait.”

“Oh my, Vernoux-sama, are you sure you want to eat another slice?”

If I don't get him to slow down, then he might take my letter while I'm writing it like he does to Gille-sama, she warned herself. Vernoux laughed.

“Don't worry, I'll enjoy the tea.”

“...”

Looks like I can't buy some time, after all, Cordelia thought and resolved to finish her reply as quickly as possible.

Cordelia slowly dipped the pen into the brand-new ink which had been delivered to her. She watched as the ink was sucked into the pen and then slowly began to write.

『Thank you for the wonderful present. I wanted to use the pen I'd received from you straight away to write a reply. I am surprised that it is very comfortable to write with, even though it looks beautiful enough to be an ornament. I will be careful with it so that I don't break it. The kikyō flowers on the ink jar are also beautiful. It makes me want to see the real thing.

Thank you for arranging things with the Green Witch. I look forward to meeting her in five days.』

Cordelia slowly read the letter that she'd tried to finish as quickly as possible without scribbling. *I can't find any mistakes. This is probably fine.*

“You've already finished? That was fast.”

“Yes. I thought that you would snatch it off me while I was in the middle of writing.”

“Well, it's good to finish fast.”

He probably would have snatched it off me since he didn't say he wouldn't. She sighed and picked up the teacup.

“Oh yeah, did you already tell the Earl that you'll be visiting the Green Witch?”

“Yes, he gave me permission. He knows that I'll be going with you and your friend who knows a lot about plants, so he wants to meet you both. He agreed to let me go when I told him that I would bring Ronnie with me.”

Their destination was in the Royal Capital, so it didn't seem like Elvis was against it when she'd asked him before the Founding Festival. But, the incident with the flora silks and Ghost happened after the Founding Festival, so when she'd asked him again, he looked bitter. She thought he was going to refuse, but he agreed in the end because Ronnie would be accompanying her. Afterwards, Ronnie said, “He told me to look after you in a lot of ways,” so she concluded that it would be fine.

“... Well, he certainly wouldn't have to worry about strange bugs if that magician is with us.”

“Did you say something?”

“Nope, just talking to myself. Anyway, I'm looking forward to seeing what would happen.”

“Huh? Yes, I'm looking forward to it too.”

What does he mean, what would happen? Vernoux-sama is unlikely to show interest in my experiments, so that means that he'll get something good out of me meeting the Green Witch. Cordelia tilted her head.

“Dilly, before I forget, seal that letter if you're finished with it.”

“Okay, right away.”

She thought it was strange but had stopped thinking about it because Vernoux was rushing her. *The way he speaks is terrible, but it's Vernoux-sama. It doesn't matter if it's good or bad, the most he would do is make fun of me. He probably wouldn't do anything that leads to a fatal blunder.*

“Oh yeah. I might have said this before, but I'm introducing you to the Green Witch as 『my friend Dilly』. So, don't wear really flashy clothes. If you have clothes for incognito, then those will do, but if you don't, then you can just wear what you have on now. Do you mind if we meet you in town?”

“Okay, I don't mind.”

I can do something about my clothes, and I don't have any problems with meeting her as 『Dilly』 instead of 『Earl Pameradia's daughter』.

(I'm excited to meet them in town. It feels like something friends would do.)

It was normal to meet friends outside in Japan. But I've never met friends outside before in this world, even if we have arranged a time to meet. It feels nostalgic.

“I'm glad you're looking forward to it. Then, let's move onto the other reason why I'm here.”

“Oh my, did you need something from me, Vernoux-sama?”

What the heck does he want? Cordelia tilted her head in curiosity, and Vernoux took out some cards.

“I’m actually free today. You’ll help me kill time, right?”

He’s making a request, but why is he saying it like it’s already been decided?

“I don’t mind... I haven’t played in a while, so I might lose.”

If you had time, then I wish you’d let me take my time writing that letter. You could have told me, she thought as she lightly shrugged.

“What? You got complaints before we even start?”

He raised the corner of his lips in amusement, so she knew what he was trying to say, but her face twitched at being told so by Vernoux.

“I haven’t played in a while... But that doesn’t mean my chances of winning are bad. You remember our games, do you not?”

“Then, I’ll just make you lose more.”

Afterwards, they continued their card match until the sun went down, but their winning percentage didn’t budge and remained at 50/50.

Act 32: Meeting and How to Call Each Other

Five days after Vernoux had visited Cordelia.

Cordelia went to town with the reluctant Ronnie.

Lara, who had eagerly bought town clothes for Cordelia, looked very satisfied when she saw Cordelia in them. Cordelia noticed that and decided that she would give the clothes to Lara when she grew taller. *I'm sure they'll suit her, and she probably chose these clothes because she likes the design.*

The place where she was meeting Vernoux and Gille was in front of the fountain in the plaza. It was a popular place to meet up, so there were a lot of friends and lovers standing around waiting for each other. In short, there were a lot of people.

Cordelia was worried about whether she would be able to find two boys in that crowded place, but she worried for no reason.

“Found you. Dilly, long time no see.”

“It's been a while, Gille-sama.”

Gille, who she had been able to meet again before the Founding Festival, had nimbly approached them. *Did he run here? His hair is a bit messy.*

“I'm glad I found you. I was worried since there are a lot of people here today.”

“Hey, Gille. Don't just run off.”

Vernoux had appeared behind Gille, who was catching his breath.

“...”

“Oh, Dilly.”

“Sorry, I'm just a little surprised by your hair colour.”

He had purposely changed his hair colour when she had met him in town for the first time when they were eight, but right now his hair was still blonde. She thought that he would change his hair every time he went out incognito, so she couldn't help but think that it was strange to see him with his usual appearance.

And, even though she hadn't told everyone, Vernoux got the message and whispered into her ear.

“I'm already used to going incognito, so it's fine. It takes a lot of magic to change appearances.”

“I see. Alright.”

A lot of nobles had blonde hair, but that didn't mean that commoners didn't have blonde hair either. A blonde hair child, who isn't used to going incognito, would definitely stand out if they wander around.

(... Though, I thought Vernoux-sama was already used to going incognito at that time.)

In any case, the current Vernoux-sama definitely doesn't allude a 『noble aura』. So, there really shouldn't be any problems.

“... Vernoux.”

“Oh, sorry. My bad. Don’t glare at me Gille.”

Vernoux lightly tapped Cordelia’s shoulder before stepping away from her; now he stood in front of Ronnie.

“Today, Ronnie’s here too. I’m counting on you.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

From Ronnie’s reply, Cordelia could tell that he was more nervous than usual. *He really is bad at being formal. He was probably reluctant to come because he knew this would happen.*

(Do you best, Ronnie. I’ll thank you for this later.)

Cordelia cheered for him in her mind before looking at Gille.

“This is the first time you’ve met him Gille-sama. This is Ronnie. He works at my house. Ronnie, this is Vernoux-sama’s friend, Gille-sama.”

“Nice to meet you, I am Ronnie Eris. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Just call me Gille. Nice to meet you.”

Gille had a gentler aura than Vernoux, but Ronnie’s nervousness didn’t go away. *I actually feel really bad.* When Cordelia started feeling a little guilty, Vernoux scratched his head.

“Mm... This isn’t good.”

“Isn’t good? What’s not good?”

Cordelia urged Vernoux to continue with her eyes.

“The way Dilly and Ronnie talk. Can you act a bit more casual in front of the Green Witch?”

“Now that you mention it, that’s true...”

I’m wearing clothes that Vernoux-sama told me to wear, so there shouldn’t be a problem with my clothes, but it’s probably strange for the oldest one of us, Ronnie, to talk so formally.

However, the thing that Vernoux had pointed out was a godsend to Ronnie.

“Then, I won’t hold back. I’ll just call Ojou-sama, Dilly. What was I thinking? It’s more difficult than I thought it would be.”

Even though he’d said that, he looked a lot livelier than before.

“It’ll be fine if you call her anything except for Ojou-sama. You won’t seem suspicious if the Green Witch thinks of you as someone who’s just a little polite.”

“Then I’ll go with that. It might take some time for me to get used to calling Ojou-sama Dilly, though.”

Ronnie relaxed and went back to how he usually acted. *That’s good, Ronnie’s not nervous anymore.*

——— Vernoux’s gaze immediately landed on Cordelia.

“Now it’s Dilly’s turn. Can you do it?”

“...”

How great would it be if I could answer yes to that question? I don’t think I could easily change how I speak.

“I can... but I can’t say for sure.”

“Thought so.”

It’s vexing how he agreed with me, but it’s true. I can probably do it if I think before I talk, but that would probably be awkward.

“Then at least call us by our names. Call me Vernoux, not Vernoux-sama and call Gille, Gille not Gille-sama.”

“Huh...?”

“You can do that much right? It’s not like you have to call us that all the time.”

Well, that’s true. It wasn’t like I’m going to be calling them that in the public’s gaze, so I don’t have to worry about being told off or causing misunderstandings. So, it’s fine. Yes, it should be fine. ———
Cordelia froze.

(Drop the honorifics, drop it...!)

It’s completely different from when I call Emina, Ronnie and Lara by their names. Rather than familiarity, I learnt that I shouldn’t call noble friends of the same age, on top of that male friends, by their names in mannerism classes. It’s not a big deal to call friends by their names in my previous world, but my face gets redder the more I think about it.

“It’s just like when you call Ronnie by his name.”

Don’t say it so easily!

She wanted to yell, but she knew that this was necessary, so she didn’t argue.

(It’s so difficult just to call them by their names.)

Cordelia couldn’t help but think, but this was a matter of guts. There was no path forward without saying their names...!

“Ve-Verno... nox...”

But the words were awfully awkward in contrast to her spirit.

“Why do you sound so awkward? One more time.”

“Ve-Verno-nox... This is fine right!”

Now that it has come to this, who cares. Cordelia said and Vernoux looked very amused. She usually thought that he was really vexing, but today she just wanted to hide. *If there’s a hole here then I want to climb into it, if there’s none then I want to dig one...* That was how she felt.

But her sleeve was pulled.

It was Gille.

“Me too.”

“Huh?”

“Call my name too.”

“Gille-sama?”

Cordelia asked questioningly and Gille shook his head.

(“Call my name”... Does he want me to drop the honorifics?!)

Cordelia flapped her mouth open as she looked at Gille. His eyes looked different from Vernoux’s, in that they were serious. *He’s not making fun of me, so he’s trying to confirm if I can say it or not. Then there’s no other way. I can only say his name.*

“Gi... Gille.”

It was a bit awkward, but she managed to say it.

Gille smiled gently, “Mm.” *Embarrassing. This is too embarrassing. What is this?*

“Well, let’s go.”

Vernoux said lightly, in contrast to Cordelia who was blushing. Her face twitched.

(Oh yeah, we haven’t left yet...)

I feel like I’ve accumulated a considerable amount of fatigue, even though I was really looking forward to this, and we haven’t even left yet!



Act 33: Green Witch

“Gille... umm, thanks for the present.”

Cordelia told Gille, who was walking next to her, on their way to the witch’s house. She had already written that in a letter, but she also wanted to say it to him directly.

“I’m happy that you like it. I’m so relieved.”

“The pen and ink jar are very nice.”

“That’s good.”

Cordelia felt as if she was going to get embarrassed because Gille looked bashful.

But she couldn’t get swept away by that. She had something she wanted to ask.

“So... If you don’t mind, could you tell me when your birthday is? I asked Vernoux before, but he said he forgot, you know?”

Vernoux-sama told me that he would ask Gille-sama for me, but I don’t trust him with this... or rather, he probably forgot about it. I want to ask him now that we finally have the chance to meet.

Cordelia thought, but Gille froze for a moment.

“... Gille?”

“Ah, nothing. Sorry. I think something got into my eye...”

“Oh my, that’s horrible. You can’t rub it; you might damage your eyes. Is there anywhere we can wash it out...?”

It might be sand, but it would be terrible if a small bug flew into his eye.

However, Vernoux said, in disgust, as Cordelia looked around.

“Just leave him, Dilly. He’s fine. His tears will make it go out if something really got into his eye.”

“Really...? But it hurts because something’s there, right?”

Those are icy words to say to a friend. However, Gille quickly defended Vernoux as Cordelia stared at him, coldly, “Yeah, I’m really alright.” She wasn’t convinced, but she didn’t say anything else. And unfortunately, she couldn’t find a place where he could wash his eyes right away.

“... Tell me if it starts to hurt, alright?”

“Ok, I’m fine. Anyway, do you want to find out more about aromas at Sensei’s place?”

Cordelia nodded while worrying about Gille, who kept insisting that he was fine.

“Yes. I was wondering if she also knows about water plants.”

“Water plants?”

“Yes.”

Gille tilted his head in confusion and Cordelia nodded while smiling.

The things I want are undoubtedly different from what others want, and, right now, I want ingredients for oblaat. [1]

I found out about this by chance when I saw Hans taking his medicine, but the oblaat of this world was lightly baked pastry, —— or rather, it seems they have hard oblaat, and the edible, flexible oblaat invented by doctors in Japan doesn't exist here. This might be useful if I can make it. At least Hans would be happy about it. She wanted to look for agar, but it seemed that the people of this kingdom didn't know about agar.

(But there were about 4000 kinds of red algae which were used as ingredients for agar in my previous world. This world has a lot of plants that are similar to the ones that exist in my former world, so it's not like it doesn't exist in this world at all.)

And agar is also good for beauty. It would be great if I can make it. Now, will it turn out well?

"It looks like you still want to keep what you're using it for a secret."

"Yes. But you can see it when it's done."

"Then I'm looking forward to it."

I want to do my best to surprise this friend who doesn't force me to answer him, Cordelia laughed a little.

"If it's a good invention, then you might be able to put it into the big bookcase at the Royal Castle. Do your best."

"Big bookcase?"

"Yeah. It's a restricted archive in the castle... But you can get a permit to enter if your invention is approved at a competition held by the royal family. It probably has the best book collection in the entire kingdom."

Gille-sama said probably, but there's no need to guess that it is. It's a really fascinating place. On the other hand, she was anxious about that place.

If possible, she didn't want to get close to the castle. She wanted to avoid the place where she might encounter the prince as much as possible.

However, she couldn't help but be interested in the library called 'The Big Bookcase'.

There were a lot of books; a treasure house of knowledge. The things that Cordelia wanted to know might be there.

"..."

"Dilly?"

"Sorry... I just thought that I have to make something that would be approved first."

That's right. I should put off thinking about whether or not I want to go to the castle. I don't really get the aim of the competition, and I won't be able to present anything if I can't make it, so there's no point in thinking about it now. First of all, I should complete my current task.

“Oh. Look, you can see the Witch's house.”

Vernoux pointed at a house with a red triangular roof and a chimney. There was a small flower bed in front of the house, and it had a wide variety of plants. There were ceramic animal and birds hidden in the gaps of the plants.

“Cute.”

“Sensei sells medicine and herbs here. But there's no signboard, so there's hardly any first-time customers. Most of the customers are from this neighbour or are introduced here.”

Cordelia followed after Vernoux into the store as she listened to Gille's explanation.

She heard a woman's calm voice as soon as she entered the store.

“Oh my, welcome. I have some cute customers.”

The owner of the voice was a middle-aged woman with green eyes, and she wore an apron. Her hair was tied up [2] and was covered with a bandana. Her aura was gentle like her voice.

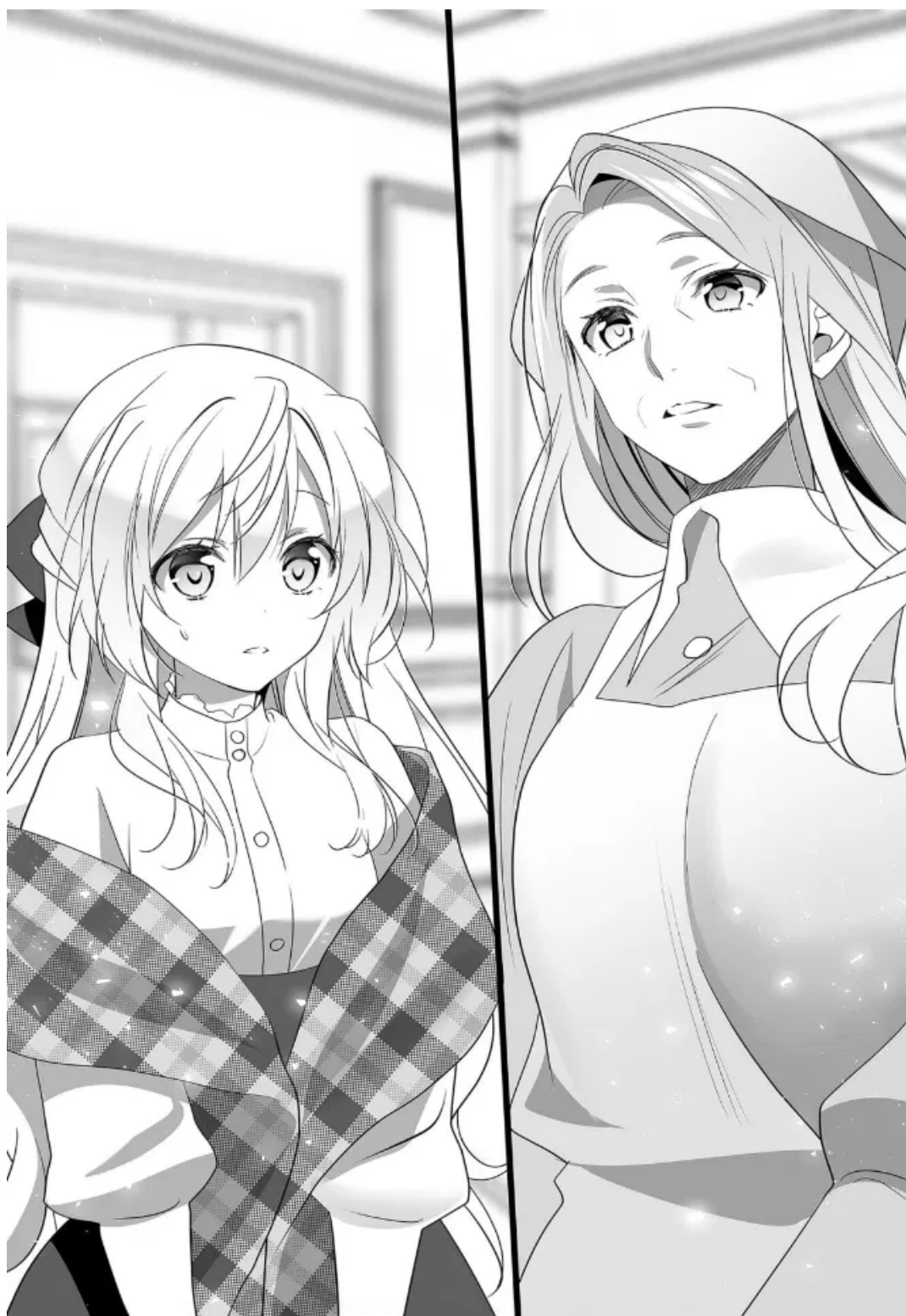
“Hello, Sensei.”

“It's been a long time.”

“Hello Gille-kun, Vernoux-kun. And this girl must be Dilly-chan whom you two told me about.”

She approached Cordelia with a gentle smile and widened her eyes.

(Huh?)



But, that was only for a second. The action was so short that Cordelia thought she might have been seeing things.

The woman slowly bent down as if nothing had happened.

“Nice to meet you. I’m a pharmacist, and people around here call me 『Green Witch』. Can I call you Dilly-chan?”

“Yes. Nice to meet you. Can I... call you Sensei?”

“Fufu, you can.”

The Witch smile wider when Cordelia asked that.

“Thank you for taking the aloe vera. I was surprised when I heard from Gille-kun that you could probably grow it. How is that child?”

Cordelia smiled and nodded at the Witch, who called the aloe vera 『that child』. The aloe vera that she had been given was a very important plant to the Witch.

“It’s growing very well. I brought this with me.”

“This is?”

“Aloe vera gel. I made it into a moisturiser.”

Aloe vera, which is also said to have been often used by Cleopatra, has a lot of uses; from applying it on burns and rashes to moisturising. This time Cordelia brought gel she had collected from the leaves and simmered. It could last for a month if it were kept in a cool place, so she packed it in a magic container which held a cooling effect, even though it was a bit pricey, because she didn’t know if the Witch would have a cool place to store it.

The Witch looked surprised when she picked it up.

“I heard it from these two... but you really love herbs, don’t you Dilly-chan? Do you mind if I try it right now?”

“Yes, please do. It will moisturise your skin.”

“Really? Thanks.”

The Witch smiled back at Cordelia, and this time she spoke to Ronnie, who looked bored.

“So, you’re... Dilly’s Onii-san?”

“Yes, something like that. Sorry to bother you.”

“Not at all. I’m sure you’re worried about her because she’s so cute.”

Ronnie smiled wryly, and the Witch returned it with a similar expression, then she clapped.

“I would like to talk more, but I want Vernoux-kun and Gille-kun to show me the homework I gave them last time. Dilly-chan and Onii-san, please wait for a bit. You can look around while you wait.”

Then, the Witch turned to Gille and Vernoux.

Cordelia was told that she could look around, so she didn't hesitate to do just that.

There was a counter near the entrance, but it looked like decoration, and there wasn't a cash register on it for money exchange; on top of the counter was a basket decorated with dry flowers. Also, half of the shop was covered in shelves and bookshelves, and bottles filled with herbs were tightly lined up on the shelves. The other half of the shop had two large tables on it. On one side of the table was a vase and on the other, a mortar and scales. The window next to the table had lace curtains so that light wouldn't come in, and herbs were hanging on beams on the side.

(Somehow, it's a really soothing place.)

It's my first time here, but it makes me feel at ease. It's completely different from my laboratory, but I realise that I love places which have plants and books.

She thought as she approached shelves with bottles on them and saw that there were dried plants in the bottles.

She was surprised by what she saw.

"This is lavender, and this one is rosemary."

Never mind lavender, rosemary shouldn't be available near the Royal Capital. She concentrated magic into her eyes and saw that it was in excellent condition and was of high quality.

(She is someone who got her hands on aloe vera. It shouldn't be surprising, but for some reason it is.)

At the same time, Cordelia was happy. *I've met an amazing person.*

She controlled the smile that naturally appeared on her face as she looked at the bottles next to the lavender and rosemary.

"Huh? What is this bright madder red leaf...?"

"Oh, these are tirani leaves. If you boil it and drink it, then you can relieve throat irritations... Hold on, Ojou... Dilly, you don't know about this plant? Well, it's not a grass that grows in the forest a lot."

Cordelia looked up at Ronnie, who was now standing next to her.

"Tirani... I've heard of the name. But it's my first time seeing it. If I remember correctly, it can't be grown in the north because it succumbs to frost, right?"

"Yes. I heard that there used to be a lot in the mountains, but now it's better to grow it yourself if you want it. It's not expensive to buy."

"Oh my, is that so?"

She confirmed that it was the tirani she read about in books and looked at the bottle next to it. There was a green plant in there that looked like marimo; the difference was that there was no water in the bottle.

"What's this?"

"It's thika. If you dissolve it in water, then it becomes a hangover cure. It's has a really strong taste."

“That sounds familiar. If I remember correctly, it grows under trees because it’s weak against rain... right?”

“Yes, that’s right. Well, sometimes it doesn’t grow well under trees either, so people grow them in cabins if they want to use it for business purposes.”

Cordelia was stunned when she heard Ronnie’s explanation.

“Perhaps, are these two herbs well-known?”

These plants were quite different from the ones Cordelia were usually interested in, so she never thought of using them or researching about them, but she did know their names from books. It was also her first time seeing them. But from what she’d just heard, it was effortless to obtain... In other words, they were common plants in this world.

“Yes. At least, they’re so well-known that they can’t be compared to rosemary or lavender. For instance... it might be a little different, but the difference is like if I was a minor rosemary and the King and Prince are thika.”

When Ronnie said that, a loud choking sound came from the desk.

“Hey, Gille. Are you okay?”

“Sorry, somewhat...”

Vernoux spoke to Gille, who had choked, but he sounded as if he was holding back his laughter instead of worrying over Gille.

What are you laughing about when your friend is suffering...? She thought, but Gille had stopped coughing straight away, so Cordelia didn’t say anything to him. She was worried about him feeling unwell, but if nothing was wrong, then she was more interested in the flowers on the shelves.

“This is... thyme... liquorice root?”

The thyme was planted in a small pot, so she knew what it was straight away, and the liquorice was labelled. She didn’t search for them because they didn’t fall into her goal of 『making essential oils』, but she knew a lot about them.

In her previous life, liquorice was one of the most beloved plants since ancient times. Sweet liquorice beverages were extremely popular in ancient Egypt and soldiers in ancient Rome ate it to build stamina. Also, the syrup is effective against bronchitis.

On the other hand, thyme is a traditional herb that was used to make mummies because of its antibacterial properties. Nonetheless, Cordelia didn’t plan on making any mummies. But she could use it to make tinctures and use that to take care of the areas around her teeth.

(Thyme also smells good if you burn the twigs.)

I want it. I wonder if she’ll give me some seeds.

She thought as she moved to the shelf at the back; a plant on that shelf made her want to raise her voice in surprise.

“Is this wine pickled hyssop?”

“... You surprised me again. You really love herbs more than I thought you would.”

Cordelia nodded at the Witch, who had left Vernoux and Gille and approached her.

“I studied about them in books.”

“Even so, you’re amazing. I mean, you wouldn’t be able to read detailed information about herbs unless you read specialty books, right?”

The Witch said, and Cordelia brushed it off by laughing a little. *There’s no way I can tell her that ‘it’s knowledge from my previous life’.*

“But, it’s such a waste. It’s too bad that you don’t get many opportunities to see universal herbs, even though you know so much about them.”

The ‘universal herbs’ that the Witch is talking about is probably the tirani and thika. It might certainly be a waste.

(... I was born into the Pameradia House, whose magic powers are compatible with plants. So, I should learn more about universal herbs, right?)

They probably didn’t teach her at home because her interests pointed in a different direction. It wasn’t necessary for nobles to learn about this, unlike cultural based education with subjects such as history, politics, current affairs, dance and mannerisms. So, if she were interested in plants for another reason, then she would probably have to make time to learn about it.

Cordelia thought, as the Witch took a book from the shelf and gave it to her.

“You might like this book. Tirani and thika are useful if you blend them with plants that have a good affinity with them. Do you want to be a pharmacist or something relating to it in the future?”

“Huh? I’ve never thought about becoming a pharmacist.”

“Oh? Then why are you interested in herbs?”

“Because... I’m researching essential oils. I love aromas... but I also want to learn about other things, so I came here today,” said Cordelia.

The Witch widened her eyes, but she immediately cast her eyes down and smiled.

“That’s wonderful. Do you want to study with Vernoux-kun and Gille-kun?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Knowledge from my previous life and magic from this world.

I’ve always been thinking about combining them. But I might be able to extend it even more if I mix it with herbs which are unique to this world.

(I haven’t thought about it... But ‘pharmacist’ sounds good.)

I don't know how much knowledge I can absorb, but if I can understand bits and pieces, then I want to learn what I can. If I can gain knowledge that I haven't been able to find before, then I can't miss this chance.

"It makes me happy if my knowledge is useful to you all. Now, let's start with the book I just gave you. If you don't understand anything, then you can always ask me."

The Witch prompted, and Cordelia carried the book to the large desk where Gille and Vernoux were. She sat down, opened the book... and met Gille's eyes.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing... I just think you're both alike."

"Alike?"

"The way Sensei and Dilly laugh. You look alike."

"... Do we?"

"Yeah. I wonder what it is. Your eyes are similar."

Cordelia had never seen her smile before, so she imagine what it looked like, and she couldn't understand what he meant by 'your eyes are similar' because red and green eyes are completely different.

Cordelia secretly looked at the Witch to confirm it. But unfortunately, she couldn't tell if they were similar or not. But their eyes met while Cordelia was staring at her. The Witch smiled gently. Cordelia was drawn by her smile and also smiled. Then, she looked at Gille again and muttered.

"Thank you."

I don't know if we're alike, but I'll be happy if we are. I can't help but feel pleased if I give off a gentle impression like her. But it was really embarrassing, so she immediately averted her gaze from Gille.

And, she looked at the Witch's profile again as if brushing it off and tilted her head.

(Huh?)

Why do I feel déjà vu?

For a moment there, I felt like she resembled someone that wasn't me. She blinked and looked at the Witch again.

(... Is it just my imagination?)

If I think about it, I don't know her or any woman her age. But even so, where did I get that impression from? In the end, nothing came to mind, so she decided that it was just her imagination; since she was more interested in the book, she was holding.

↑ **1** <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oblaat>

↑ **2** Yes, I know the image is different...

Act 34: Muffin and the Boy

Cordelia tried to return to her book, but she realised that Gille and Vernoux weren't reading, and were writing something.

"What are you two doing?"

Vernoux showed Cordelia the book he was holding when she asked that. The book had some pictures of medicinal herbs, but the names of the herbs weren't written in the book.

"Our task is to name the herbs. We have to guess the name of the herbs in the picture and write down their traits in this notebook. Sensei said we can look at the books on that shelf, so we can look up things we don't know. And we have to remember them one by one."

Vernoux continued while pointing at the book and notebook. *That notebook is probably something he brought with him. I should have prepared one too, she thought, but nothing could be done about it now. I have to make sure not to forget one the next time.*

(Oh yeah, I can use Lara's pencil here if it's completed to a certain extent. It's easier to carry around than a pen and Vernoux-sama also seemed interested in it.

I really want to show it to him... No, I want to show him the complete product. I forget about it if I don't think about it, but he is the heir to the Flantheim House. If he likes it and uses it in a public place, then I can probably get good advertisement.

(Of course, it was made for the village children to use while studying, but I can also get more funding if it sells. Luckily, the Pameradia fief has a lot of timber, and I can make it a new speciality-... I wonder if this is just wishful thinking.)

But in any case, making money is a good thing.

I don't have the confidence to make plastic erasers right away, but I can make bread erasers. If I can, I want to sell that together with the pencil.

(Well, leaving that aside for now... It's more important to distinguish the difference between similar flowers right now. There was also a lot of news in Japan about accidents happening because of similar herbs, huh.)

I remember seeing news on accidents such as people mistaking Chinese chives and daffodils or mistaking poisonous mushrooms for edible ones.

(It can also be life-threatening. I have to remember how to tell them apart.)

Cordelia thought that and checked the book that she was given. The hand that she used to open the cover was a little stiff from tension.

There was no introduction in the book that she had been given and it was filled with content about plants from the beginning. The left page had the herb drawn from many angles and the left page contained the herb's name, traits, cultivation conditions and usage.

(Not a lot of books in the library at home had cultivation methods in them, and the pictures didn't have as many angles like this.)

The amount they could publish is probably different too.

The books in the library at the Pameradia House described a wide selection of herbs. They probably didn't include the habitat because the books included poisonous herbs. On the other hand, this book could be found in the vicinity of the Royal Capital, or even on main roads, and contained a careful selection of herbs that were easy to grow. They could probably provide more details if they didn't publish many copies. This was perhaps the best book for Cordelia if the Green Witch assumed that she was interested in universal herbs.

(But, there's too much information here for an introduction to these herbs. Especially the companion plants. It's extensive.)

Companion plants are plants that provide a positive effect when grown with other crops, such as vegetables; ——— for example, plants that keep insects away.

A typical example is calendula[1] in the Asteraceae family and marigold in the tagetes erecta[2] family, which look very similar to each other. Marigolds were purely for admiration, so they can't be used as a substitute for calendula. But it was compatible with a lot of plants, and has effects such as keeping away insects, preventing plant diseases and helping in growth. In Cordelia's past life, she had planted it with corn before.

(However, this book doesn't have any entries on marigold; all the entries are about plants unique to this world.)

At the same time, she thought about absorbing new knowledge, she finally remembered about marigold and kept in mind to find marigold habitats in the future. She couldn't find where they grew when she had skimmed through the pages before. *I probably can't get it around the Royal Capital's outskirts, which means it's also worth looking for.*

Cordelia gained new knowledge and a goal, so she cheerfully moved onto the next page... and froze.

The usage of the herb on that page horrified her.

(Ummm, pickle legs of brown frogs with leil grass... eh, frogs?)

She thought she had read it wrong, but she saw the word 'brown frog' written on the description when she looked at it again.

She had heard that brown frogs were sold in the Edo period as something that could stop infants from throwing tantrums and crying at night.

Regardless of whether they had that effect or not, Cordelia wasn't very good with frogs. She didn't want to touch them if possible. So, she would have difficulty peeling the skin to use the meat.

At any rate, Cordelia didn't know if frogs were served as food in this kingdom. *No, on reflection, there may be edible frogs here, similar to the American bullfrog...* As someone who lived as a Japanese

person, she had never eaten frogs before, so she was against it. To begin with, the frog in the book looked big enough to be found anywhere and wasn't the same size as an American bullfrog...

(Although, this doesn't mean that brown frogs are used for the same purpose here as they were in the Edo period. The effect of this leil grass might be used to cure some other diseases.)

I'm not good with frogs, but I have to touch them straight away. I might be able to achieve results with what I know. I'm motivated to touch them through willpower and spirit if they do give an immense effect.

Cordelia continued reading.

(After boiling the frog legs with salt, coat them with minced leil grass and eat it... so, you do eat it, after all. So, it helps settle children's stomachs? Amongst frogs, brown frogs had water magic, so it's easier to boost the effects of the leil grass...)

She had learnt what effects it gave, but she still didn't want to eat them. *If it's only about water magic then I think it could be substituted with fish, but is there a reason why it has to be frogs?* But nothing else was written about it. *I'll remember to ask this later.*

(But this is surely the end of the frog page...)

Cordelia pulled herself together and quickly turned the page. But the next page was also full of provocative things, which needed courage to carry out. Cicadas, bee larvae, grasshoppers... It wasn't like she couldn't eat them, rather, the culture of traditional food was something that must be held in high regard.

(I'm not used to such a high hurdle. Well, I will do my best if it's necessary...!)

If this is the introduction, then does that mean that the Witch usually makes medicine from plants and animals? But the bottles in the room all contain plants. I'm sure these entries are the exception.

The next page will have something different... Cordelia believed that as she flipped to a new page.

"Oh, water plants."

Cordelia couldn't help but speak out in relief as she relaxed. The section had finally changed. It seemed that this section was about water plants, which grew in freshwater, and plants which could be combined with those that grew around the Royal Capital.

(This is really interesting... Huh? It even has red algae which grow in freshwater?)

Most red algae grew in seawater, but she had heard before that some of them also grew in freshwater.

She had also come to the Witch's place because she wanted to know about water plants, but she had read too many shocking entries in this book, so she didn't think she would find them and was surprised. As she continued to turn the pages, the entries gradually went into red algae which grew in the sea. There was also an entry about seaweed from the gelidiaceae family which was used as fertiliser.

(I can't believe that I found it so soon...)

Cordelia was surprised as she read the entry.

(Myles-sama or Clifton-sama are both knowledgeable about the sea, so I can probably get it easily if I ask them.)

Cordelia remembered the boys she'd met through Vernoux, who were good at trading. She had only met them once or twice, but they did send letters to each other. They would probably make arrangements for it if she hinted that she wanted to buy some.

(But... if I can get my hands on freshwater red algae, then I also want to cultivate them in the Pameradia fief and export it out. Unfortunately, our fief doesn't face the ocean.)

But if I can get water plants for making oblaat, then I want to proceed with that, for the most part.

Oblaal will definitely come in handy in the future. The primary thing is to get Hans to take his medicine easily, but others can also use it to take medication, and it can even be used for candy.

(I don't know if I can do it or not. I only know bits of information on most seaweeds. I don't know if the water plants in this book could be used in the same way as plants from the gelidiaceae family.)

But I can try it if I'm curious about it. Fortunately, I have a lot of time, and I can fund it somehow if I am able to buy it... or so I would like to believe. And I can use it as fertiliser even if I can't use it as materials for oblaat.

(At any rate, I have to cram all this information about water plants into my head.)

And I'll immediately try to search for anything to do with seaweed when I get home.

Cordelia continued to read her book after that, and time quickly passed by.

“Shall we have tea soon?”

She lifted her face when she heard the Witch speak and heard cheerful singing coming from outside.

“Singing?”

“Oh, that? That choir tells people around here that it’s time for snacks.”

“It’s not. That choir is honouring the saint.”

“... You know, I was just acting stupid, ok?”

Cordelia stopped breathing in surprise when she heard Gille correcting Vernoux seriously.

Saint.

That word probably doesn’t refer to the person that Cordelia feared. But she ended up being reminded of the game’s heroine, Shelley.

(I thought of something awful.)

Even though it was her first time listening to the choir, she couldn’t enjoy it because she remembered something terrible.

“What’s wrong? Are you tired?”

“No, I’m not... Mm, have you two heard about the 『Dreamer girl』?”

Cordelia boldly asked what was on her mind. She’d talked to Hazel about it before, but she had never spoken to these two about it. *They’ve probably heard about her because they go to town a lot, but I’m curious about their opinion of her.*

Vernoux and Gille widened their eyes when Cordelia asked them that.

“The Dreamer?”

“Yes.”

Vernoux said suspiciously, and Cordelia nodded. His reaction was as if he’d never heard of her before, but before long, something clicked.

“Oh. Come to think of it. Apparently, there’s a child who’s said to be the second coming of the saint. I don’t believe in fortune telling, but people can believe what they want if it doesn’t bring me any harm. It sounds like all she could do are weather fortunes.”

“How about you Gille?”

“Well... I’ve never met her before, so I don’t know. Well, I have heard about her, though?”

It looks like they’re not that interested. Cordelia was especially relieved when it seemed like Vernoux wasn’t really that interested in Shelley. Judging from his character, he probably wouldn’t unconditionally become obsessed with the saint, but it was still great to hear it.

(Vernoux-sama was also one of the game's capture targets, but he also played the role of mediating between the Prince and the Heroine.)

We've known each other for so long, so I don't think he will suddenly change, but I wanted to get rid of the anxiety that was building up within me. I'm sorry for doubting you, but I wanted to hear it clearly no matter what.

"But this is unusual. I'm surprised that you're curious about this kind of rumour, Dilly."

"I heard about her from Hazel-sama the other day."

Vernoux choked when he heard Cordelia's reply. *He probably didn't expect to hear her name.*

"Are you okay?"

"Ye-yeah."

Gille, who had asked that while smiling wryly, seemed to know Hazel as well. Hazel's name seemed to have worked, and Vernoux didn't ask her any more questions.

"By the way, where's Ronnie...?"

"Ah, I'm here."

Ronnie answered from the counter at the end of the shop while Cordelia looked around for him. He was sitting on a chair with no back and leaning against the wall.

"... What're you doing?"

"I was talking to a lady guest before because everyone was studying. Apparently, I look like her grandson."

"Oh, is that so?"

"It was nice to hear about the sweets that the Onee-samas at work might like."

Before she knew it, Ronnie was tending to the shop. But he seemed to be having a good time, so it was worthwhile. *That's great. I want to hear about the sweets the lady talked about, so I can buy some for Ronnie later as thanks for today.*

Cordelia thought that, and the Witch came back with a wooden tray.

"I made some cocoa custard muffins today. Please eat it with this herbal tea."

The Witch said, as she quickly served everyone a muffin and herbal tea. The cocoa and custard were layered on top of each other, and the muffin was sweet and slightly bitter.

"It's my first time making this muffin. I heard from the market that kids like this kind of muffins better than the ones with fruits. How is it?"

"It's delicious, really. I feel like I can eat a few of them."

"Fufu, that's good."

The muffin was different from the sweets at home, but she felt the taste of home. *It tastes nostalgic*, it was that kind of taste.

(I could make some for Otou-sama if she teaches me how to make it...)

But she wasn't bold enough to ask someone to teach her something like this at their first meeting. She was already here to learn. She probably had to wait for more time to pass before asking the Witch to teach her the recipe.

"By the way, Dilly-chan, how's the book? Is there anything you don't understand?"

"Hmm... I was shocked. That... I've never thought of mixing frogs with herbs before."

She was surprised that the Witch had suddenly talked to her while she was focusing on the muffin, so she couldn't help but honestly admit what shocked her the most... She regretted it as soon as she'd said it. *Why did I talk about the amphibian I wasn't good with while enjoying my muffin?* But it was true that she had been shocked.

Cordelia put the muffin down and stared straight at the Witch who laughed.

"It doesn't have much to do with aromas, but this kind of thing is also interesting, right? But, I honestly thought you were going to skim through it... You're really diligent, aren't you?"

"E-err... I know that frogs are used for medicine because they have water magic... but can you not substitute them with fish?"

She felt embarrassed at being praised and tried to hide it by talking. The Witch continued to smile.

"It doesn't make much sense to combine leil grass with fish, but I think it's fine to use the grass on its own. However, frogs often eat the seeds of leil grass when they're tadpoles, so their magic power is compatible with leil grass. Do you not like frogs?"

It was difficult for her to say 'yes', but she couldn't deny it either, so she smiled wryly in response.

"How about the other entries?"

"Well, I was drawn to the waterside plants... especially those that grow in the water."

"I have other books on water plants too. I'll lend it to you later."

"Thank you."

"Now, it's time for Gille-kun and Vernoux-kun's questions."

When the Witch said that, the door opened vigorously and the bell on the door rang.

"Witch-sense-!"

The person who had appeared with those words was a little boy. He looked younger than 10-years-old and seemed very energetic.

The Witch stood up when she saw the child, "Oh, you're here Mick," and immediately moved towards the boy.

“Weren’t you supposed to run your errands tomorrow?”

“Yes, but I promised to play with friends tomorrow, so I came today!”

“I see. Then, wait a minute. I have the medicine, so I’ll just get a paper bag for them.”

This boy was a customer.

The Witch walked away from the boy and went to the back of the shop.

The boy looked around the shop and then finally observed Cordelia, Gille and Vernoux.

“What’re you guys doing?”

The boy was smaller than Cordelia, Gille and Vernoux, and he didn’t seem shy of strangers. On the contrary, Cordelia was surprised that he had spoken to them.

But the boy took advantage of this little opening.

“Go~t it!”

“?”

The boy suddenly appeared near Cordelia when she thought he was going to run, and he had a muffin in his hand. She looked down at her empty plate, and when she looked back at the boy, he had already gobbled it down.



(M-my muffin...!)

Cordelia resisted the urge to yell that.

No, I can't yell. It's childish.

Well, I'm certainly a 13-year-old child, but I'm not childish enough to yell at a boy who's obviously younger than me. But her face twitched because she wanted to savour her muffin, but it was snatched.

But, bear with it, put up with it. I must put up with it. Ladies shouldn't have short tempers. It's not a waste. ——— She persuaded herself, and the boy continued to provoke her.

"It's your fault for spacing out."

"Wh-?"

"You should have put it into your stomach if you didn't want it to be taken."

He isn't sorry at all. I shouldn't get angry because of small things, but I can't stay quiet if he's trying to pick a fight with me. There is something called civility in the world. I won't yell at him, but I do want to say something.

When Cordelia tried to speak, "You-," the Witch came back with a paper bag.

"Sorry for the wait."

The Witch continued to smile like she had when she went to the back and immediately walked until she was in front of Mick. Cordelia missed her chance to talk and followed the Witch with her eyes.

The Witch stopped in front of Mick and was about to hand over the paper bag to him, ——— but then she tilted her head.

"Oh my, Mick. Who did you get the muffin from?"

"I, I didn't eat any."

His voice obviously sounded shrill and nervous and indicated that he'd done something wrong. *What? You did do something wrong,* ——— when Cordelia thought that, the Witch continued to question the boy.

"That's strange. You have crumbs around your mouth."

Mick quickly wiped his mouth when the Witch pointed this out, and she smiled wryly.

"Well then, you won't get any sweets next time because you lied."

"Eh...?"

"Then, I'll ask you once more, okay? Who did you get the muffin from?"

The Witch spoke gently, but it was clear that she was scolding him. Mick seemed like a thoughtless person, but he also knew that she was scolding him.

"I'm sorry."

Mick had reluctantly squeezed those words out. Still, Cordelia thought that he was amazing for actually saying those words properly, but the Witch pointed out a problem with his apology.

“Mick, you’re not supposed to say that to me, right? That’s something you should say to the person who you stole the muffin from.”

Cordelia had forgotten about it since the Witch and Mick were talking, but the person who Mick had stolen the muffin from was certainly her.

“... Sorry.”

Mick turned towards Cordelia and quickly said while averting his eyes.

“Be mindful next time, okay?”

Cordelia couldn’t say anything other than that. Of course, she thought it was a pity that the muffin had been stolen. But she didn’t want anything else since he reflected on his actions.

The Witch saw how Cordelia acted, passed the paper bag to Mick and then rubbed his head.

“Be careful on your way home.”

Mick hid his face with the paper bag and dashed away. The door closed with the same momentum after Mick had swung it open and flew out. The bell made a loud noise but quickly went silent.

“Sorry for dampening the mood. He’s also a good boy.”

The Witch slowly turned around and returned to where Cordelia, Gille and Vernoux was. She looked apologetic.

“It’s okay, I don’t mind.”

“Really? Then that’s good...”

It was difficult for Cordelia to continue the conversation. Mick was a little too naughty for her to say, ‘he’s very energetic’. The Witch probably understood that she was careful with her words. It seemed like her subtle thoughts were being conveyed to the Witch.

“He’s not good at being honest. He really just wanted to talk to you.”

The Witch said as she gave Cordelia an untouched muffin, “Here, have this.”

“He can communicate well with flowers and herbs and is really good at taking care of them.”

“Really?”

“Yes. He lives in Oulu Village. You need a carriage to get there.”

Even Cordelia knew about Oulu Village. She had never stopped there before, but she had passed it a few times whenever she went out riding.

Oulu village was a little far from the main highway, so not a lot of people went there. Even so, there were coaches going between the Royal Capital and Oulu Village at fixed intervals, and Cordelia only ever felt like she was passing a peaceful place.

“Oulu Village... Is he perhaps from the poorhouse?”

Gille, like Cordelia, was also thinking about Oulu Village.

Poorhouse?

In contrast to Cordelia, who was tilting her head in confusion, Gille looked straight at the Witch.

“Oh, do you know about Oulu Village’s poorhouse Gille-kun?”

“I do. They sometimes sell good produce and processed products in the Royal Capital market. The vegetables are delicious, and so are the pickles.”

“You must be a customer since you know so much about it. I also go to help them sometimes. I practised making this muffin because I wanted to treat them.”

The Witch stood up while saying so and took a bottle out from the cupboard.

“These are the pickles you were talking about Gille-kun?”

“Yes.”

“You can take this home with you if you’d like. I’ll give you this if you eat it.”

“Mm, err... is that alright?”

He probably didn’t want to coax her. Gille looked at the Witch as he spoke in a hesitant tone, but the Witch kept on smiling.

“Thank you.”

“Buy some more after you’ve eaten them all, okay?”

“I will.”

Gille nodded and smiled.

“I’ll show you around if you’re interested in Oulu Village. How about we make some muffins and take it with us when we go?”

The Witch said as she looked at everyone and not just Gille, but she was also joking about it. However, Cordelia heard those words and replied without hesitation.

“Please and thank you.”

The Witch widened her eyes in surprise.

“It’s a bit far from the Royal Capital, is that alright?”

“I’ll ask Otou-sama.”

“Really...? Then, we’ll go if he’s alright with it.”

But the Witch looked baffled as she said that.

However, Cordelia didn’t back away.

Act 35: Invitation to Oulu Village

Cordelia continued to read after she finished her tea and left the Witch's house before sunset.

On the way home, a little further away from the Witch's house, Vernoux asked Cordelia a question.

"What're you going to do when you go to the poorhouse Dilly?"

Vernoux, who probably had stiff shoulders as he was massaging his right shoulder with his left hand, didn't look like he was a noble boy. *I should follow his example if I'm going to town incognito*, Cordelia thought, and then answered frankly.

"I'm not doing anything. I just want to find out if there's anything I can do..."

"Say it more clearly."

"I've only heard about the poorhouse, but if I can get more insight into it, then it might be useful, right? And I'm also curious about the market that the Witch was talking about earlier."

"You have a point. We'll also be involved in charity work in the future, so it'll be worthwhile to check it out."

"It's best to know about it earlier, right?"

Cordelia said, and Vernoux shrugged.

"Well, that's just like you Dilly."

Cordelia smiled wryly in reply to his response.

However, she didn't really just want to know about poorhouses.

(I'm sure the children at poorhouses have numerous reasons for living there. Some of them probably ended up living there because of unforeseen circumstances... But there are probably some who are living there because of the Dark Fever...)

The biggest reason why Cordelia wanted to go to the poorhouse was because of that.

The disease that had led her to lose her life once... and was the cause of Ted's incident with the fake flora silks.

She couldn't unravel the cause of the disease. Despite that, she wanted to do her best to find a way to soften the incidents caused by the disease, even if just by a little. That desire was the same for her other reasons too.

"... I wonder if I should go too."

"Eh, are you interested in Oulu Village too, Gille?"

Vernoux reacted in a dramatic way when he heard Gille's whisper. Gille nodded quietly.

"I heard that the poorhouse doesn't have any noble backers and is run by the village. I've heard a little about the operation, but I'd like to see how it runs."

“Ah... Oh yeah, didn’t the nobles who supported them fall to ruin?”

Vernoux said hesitantly, and Gille nodded again.

“A baron house was supporting the poorhouse until 20 years ago, but they fell to ruin because of corruption. At that time, the kingdom urgently offered to support the poorhouse, but the director declared that it would be operated by the village and it’s been like that since then. I think it’s a perfect chance to observe them if I can get invited to go there.”

“It’s not like I don’t know how you feel, and you may want to visit... But, I’m not sure if you’re allowed to go.”

Cordelia watched as Gille scowled, when Vernoux said that to him, and felt that it was unusual.

At any rate, Vernoux-sama doesn’t fit into noble common sense. He seems like someone who would accomplish anything he wants to do, no matter how reckless.

(The reason why he has a negative response to this... is it because of Gille-sama’s family?)

Cordelia had thought that Gille also came from a House that was as tolerant as the Flantheim House since he often went incognito with Vernoux. But she might have been mistaken, since Vernoux was hesitant to let Gille go to the poorhouse.

(In the first place, Gille-sama should have gone out incognito as many times as Vernoux-sama has, but his appearance hasn’t changed at all, unlike Vernoux-sama.)

Vernoux went out with his blonde hair now because he said he was used to going incognito, but Gille’s features hadn’t changed at all from the time when he was 8. He had grown and was taller now, but he was still clad in Vernoux’s magic, and she guessed that his original appearance was different. And he probably wouldn’t have his disguise released because he was on guard.

(But, sneaking out when it’s forbidden... Gille-sama is quite naughty too.)

She could surmise that from when she met him at Earl Hale’s mansion and when he jumped off the balcony when they met at the Flantheim’s evening party. He looked diligent but was surprisingly bold.

(Perhaps, are Vernoux-sama and Gille-sama two of a kind...?)

No, that’s not necessarily true. Gille-sama might be permitted to travel within the Royal Capital under disguise, or he might be prohibited from going out of the Royal Capital. This could hardly be surprising, since there’s no need for him to leave the Royal Capital.

“Dilly? What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing.”

Let’s not think about it too much, after all. Gille-sama doesn’t seem mischievous, isn’t that enough?
——— Cordelia convinced herself.

Next to her, Gille was persuading Vernoux.

“It’s fine, isn’t it, Vernoux?”

“... Don’t you always make up your mind when you say that?”

Gille smiled, and Vernoux sagged his shoulders.

“I don’t want to be scolded with you.”

Vernoux said, while looking bitter, but he didn’t stop Gille.

“You two are really close, aren’t you?”

Vernoux shrugged when Cordelia said that.

“Well, I don’t know where he’ll disappear to, if I leave him alone. He’s surprisingly stubborn.”

“Rude. You always invite me when you sneak out.”

“You...”

Cordelia could tell that they were really close.

And she finally noticed that they were back near the fountain.

“Shall I walk you home?”

“It’s fine, I want to do some shopping. Thank you for today.”

“I see. What’re you buying?”

“I want to look for some stationary. Oh yes, Vernoux-sama. Do you know what Clifton-sama and Myles-sama’s favourite colours are?”

Cordelia wanted to make arrangements to obtain seaweed from the gelidiaceae family as soon as she got home. Clifton and Myles were knowledgeable about the sea, so one of them or both of them might know about it. Of course, she might be able to get some through the Eris Firm, but she also wanted to expand her friends. Also, Ronnie always told her not to use the same company all the time.

However, Vernoux frowned at that question.

“Whatever colour’s fine, right? Why are you asking about Clifton and Myles?”

“I want to know more about marine products. I’ve talked to them before, and we’ve exchanged letters a bit. They’re both very knowledgeable about it, and I thought their knowledge would be useful.”

Cordelia couldn’t tell Vernoux about making oblaat yet, so she omitted it in her answer. She was also scared of being treated as an eccentric again, if she told him that she wanted seaweed. But her response was enough to change Vernoux’s expression.

“Oh yeah, you said you wanted water plants while we were walking to the Witch’s place, right? And... well, it’s you, Dilly.”

She couldn’t tell if his face was twitching or if he was appalled, but he ended his sentence with a sigh.

Just what the heck is he imagining? However, she could guess from his expression that he was thinking something rude. However, she didn't ask about it. If she did, then she would be stirring the hornets' nest.

"Then, farewell. Vernoux-sama and Gille-sama."

It will get dark if I don't end this conversation at some point. Cordelia thought, as she quickly turned around, but then Vernoux spoke to her again.

"Say, you're using suffixes again. We're dropping the 『-sama』, right?"

"I dropped it in front of Sensei. But I have to add it properly at all other times. If I accidentally call you 『Vernoux』, then people might think we're engaged."

We'll both be unhappy with that right?

When she included those words, Vernoux shrugged in a pompous way.

"That would certainly be a catastrophe."

"Right? Now, if you'll excuse me. Gille-sama, I'll see you again."

Cordelia bowed to the two and started walking with Ronnie.

"Dilly!"

However, a voice called out to her immediately after.

This time it was Gille, not Vernoux.

"I'll send you another letter!"

Although Cordelia was surprised by his sudden outburst, she couldn't help but smile.

"Yes, I'll send you one too."

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Afterwards, she patiently asked Ronnie to go home early and bought stationery from the stationery shop. After that, she went straight to the laboratory when they returned to the mansion.

"Say, Ojou-sama. You look like you're having a lot of fun. Is this related to the people who you're sending that stationery to?"

"I knew you would be able to tell, Ronnie. That's right. I'm going to ask them about it now."

"I knew it."

Cordelia looked up at Ronnie while sitting on the chair and spoke.

"I want to make 『paper that is thin enough to eat』."

“Paper? Why would you eat paper?”

Ronnie widened his eyes in surprise at Cordelia’s words. Then, he tilted his head in confusion and kept muttering, “Paper, paper.” She laughed a little at his surprise.

“What the heck are you making?”

“I want to make something that could be used when taking medicine. You know, I want Hans to use it.”

“... Is it like easy-to-use oblaat?”

“Yes. It’ll be nice if it could be used with sweets too. The ingredient will be red algae from the sea... But, if possible, I want to look for freshwater red algae.”

“You want to make paper from water plants? Will you be paper making?”

“Nope, I have to start by producing the ingredients...”

All I know is that Agar, the ingredient, is made by sun-drying red algae while sprinkling it with water. When that becomes transparent, you simmer it in a pan until it becomes soft. Then, you strain the liquid, freeze it, remove the moisture, and it’s done when it’s dry... But I don’t know how much water it needs or how long it needs to be simmered for.

(... Well, I might have thought about whether it could be made with freshwater ingredients since I’ve never made it before!)

Next, to Cordelia, who was trying to think positively, Ronnie put a hand on his chin and groaned a little.

“... Can I do that?”

“Huh? You want to do it?”

Cordelia was going to ask him for help, but she was surprised that he was offering. Ronnie muttered.

“I have a grandma too. It’s hard for her to drink powder medicines, so I want to do this if I can. It might make it easier for her to take medicine if it’s wrapped in edible paper.”

Ronnie was speaking a little quickly and was unusually shy.

Cordelia laughed a little and nodded.

“Then, Ronnie, I’ll leave this to you, but can I say something?”

“Yes.”

“The red algae I mentioned before is just a possible ingredient. Also, you might be able to use potato starch. But I don’t know how to combine those ingredients. The last step is to simmer it, spread it thinly and wait for it to dry... But it might be possible that it’ll work out better with potatoes.”

She said, and Ronnie froze.

She felt as if he was saying, “You don’t say.” Cordelia smiled wryly.

“... Do you want to quit?”

“No, I’ll do it. And I think it’s a good concept. It might be possible to get a pass into the Big Bookcase for it if it gets spread worldwide. You’re aiming for that, aren’t you, Ojou-sama?”

“Well, I do want that to happen.”

Apart from being located at the castle, there was no way that she wouldn’t be interested in that treasure trove of knowledge. Her only worry was encountering the prince.

(I don’t think my Onii-samas talk to the prince. I don’t think it would be that easy to pass by him...)

But what will the real situation be like? When Cordelia thought about asking Isma the next time she saw him, Ronnie slightly stretched.

“I’m also interested in the castle’s book collection... But I’ll think about how to make medicine easier to drink for Hans and grandma first.”

“Then, I’ll write my ideas down right now, so could you wait a moment?”

“Sure.”

Cordelia wrote down what she knew and left it with Ronnie before returning to her room. This time, she was writing letters to Myles and Clifton. She followed formalities, unlike when she wrote to Gille. She attached flower bookmarks to the letters that she had finished. The first stage of her enquiries would be complete after she gave them to Emina to send off.

(Next, I have to get permission to go to Oulu from father.)

However, Elvis didn’t get home so quickly.

Cordelia killed time in the library to calm herself and to stop from fidgeting. Then, she looked for books about the poorhouses of the fief.

(But I know almost everything in these books...)

She had already learnt about where the poorhouses were and who the financiers in her fief were. She had also seen income reports, which weren’t listed in these books, from poorhouses that had deep connections with the Pameradia House.

(However, I can’t tell what kind of places they are just from reading about them. The poorhouse in Oulu Village might be different from the ones in my fief. This is a chance for me to experience it.)

She thought, and the library door opened. The person who entered was Ronnie.

“Oh, Ojou-sama. Didn’t you go back to your room?”

“I’m killing time. You too?”

“Well, yes. I wanted to research something about the edible paper. So, I brought the paper you wrote with me.”

He said, as he fluttered the paper and showed it to her.

“So... I have something I want to ask you, Ojou-sama. Could I experiment with other ingredients that might work?”

“Huh? Yes, of course.”

“I’m glad. I thought you wouldn’t get angry. When I was in school, my teachers would get angry if I did that.”

I see. Apparently, there’s a lot of obstinate people at the Magic Academy. Ronnie must have had a hard time. My condolences. Cordelia sympathised with him in her mind.

“Oh yeah, Ronnie. Can I borrow Lara for a bit tomorrow?”

“Yes, of course. What’s wrong?”

“I want to hear about how the stationery development is going, and I want to make sachets. I want to give them to the children at the poorhouse.”

The Witch had said that she would make muffins, but it’s probably alright for me to bring a simple souvenir with me as a visitor. It’ll probably be bad to give them something expensive, but it should be alright if it’s handmade.

“Lara is good with her hands, so I feel like we’ll finish making them really quickly.”

“Then, I’ll have to make something that won’t lose to what she makes.”

Cordelia shrugged. I’m asking Lara to help me, but I won’t let her finish the sachets by herself. My sewing skills are better than before, thanks to my interactions with Hazel-sama... I wonder if the dexterous Ronnie and the dexterous Lara will end up competing with each other.

“On a different subject, Ojou-sama. Something has been bothering me today.”

“What is it?”

“How well do you know... that kid Gille?”

Come to think about it, Ronnie doesn’t talk much when Vernoux-sama comes over. We’ve probably never spoken about Gille-sama in front of him before. Cordelia answered easily.

“Since I was eight. We went to town to buy glass magic tools before, right? I met him then.”

There’s no point in hiding it now that they’ve met. Cordelia reported, and Ronnie replied slowly.

“Oh... That time?”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I was just a little curious...”

His words continued to be vague, so Cordelia tilted her head in confusion. *Does Ronnie recognise Gille-sama from somewhere?* However, Ronnie didn’t continue and shook his head.

“I’ll stop here. You’ll think I’m an idiot if I’m wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing... Well, you’ll find out eventually if I’m right.”

Ronnie’s being evasive, and he won’t say any more. What the heck is it?

When Cordelia thought that, she heard quiet footsteps. Emina showed up.

“I’m sorry for interrupting you. Ojou-sama, Master has returned. He has already had dinner.”

“Okay. Where’s Otou-sama?”

“In his study.”

“Thanks.”

Cordelia thanked Emina and left the library without turning back. She was worried that she hadn’t heard Ronnie’s response, but this was Gille whom she’d been exchanging letters with for four years. *I don’t think there will be any big drawbacks if something did happen.* Cordelia had no idea at that moment.

(Well, Ronnie will tell me if he feels like it.)

With that in mind, Cordelia walked towards the study to talk to Elvis.

◆◆◆◆◆

In front of the study, Cordelia felt as if the vibe was heavy. She couldn’t hear any sounds in the hallway, but it was apparent that Elvis was in the room.

“Excuse me; it’s Cordelia.”

“It’s open.”

There was no fondness in Elvis’s voice as usual, but he always let her in the room.

However, he was still looking at the paperwork, even though he’d given her permission to enter. He had more paperwork than usual today, so it was probably that period in time when he had to deal with a lot of issues.

“Otou-sama, I visited the pharmacist whom Vernoux and his friend are learning from today. She knows a lot about medicinal herbs, so would it be alright for me to visit her more often?”

“... Is there something you want to learn from her?”

“Yes. There are still many herbs that I don’t know about, and I want to learn about how to combine them.”

“I see.”

Elvis didn’t say anything else after that. *It should be alright for me to continue.*

However, while she was feeling relief, Elvis turned towards Cordelia.

“You didn’t come here just to report this... What do you want?”

He knows I want something. Cordelia smiled wryly, but she didn’t let it show. Therefore, she answered calmly and seriously.

“I would like to visit the poorhouse in Oulu Village.”

“Poorhouse?”

“The pharmacist I visited today helps out at the poorhouse in Oulu Village. She said that she would take me there if I wish to visit. Would it be alright for me to go?”

Cordelia said, and Elvis frowned a little.

“Oulu?”

His tone didn’t sound positive.

(It’s less dangerous than going to the forest, so Otou-sama must be worried about me leaving the Royal Capital.)

If so, then he’s probably asking me why I want to go there.

Cordelia looked straight at Elvis.

“I’ve never been to the poorhouses in our fief. So, I don’t know the difference between Oulu Village and our fief. But I would like to broaden my horizons and think about what I can do for our fief.”

When Cordelia stopped talking, Elvis stopped writing.

“... How did that pharmacist look to you?”

“Sensei? She is very kind, but she scolds properly when she has to.”

“I see.”

Cordelia felt that was unusual as she listened to his response.

She didn’t feel like there was anything unusual about being asked that question. However, she didn’t recall ever being asked a question by Elvis without eye contact.

“Bring Ronnie with you.”

“... I can go?”

“This doesn’t mean that you’ll be able to do something, even if you go. But if you think that you won’t gain anything from this, then don’t go.”

“Thank you very much.”

I can’t say that there was no possibility of gaining nothing, but I am enthusiastic about returning home with something. In that case, I will clear Otou-sama’s condition. So, I’ll do what I can. Mick and I didn’t really bury the hatchet today, so I hope that we could. She was suddenly curious about something.

(I wonder what Otou-sama was like in his childhood.)

He must have had a childhood. Obviously, there used to be a time when he was the same age as Mick and I.

(... But I can't imagine it at all.)

He probably didn't order seaweed or look for herbs in the mountain like I do.

I heard that my Onii-samas spent most of their childhoods studying and practising martial arts. Did Otou-sama also do that? However, Cordelia couldn't even imagine a short Elvis.

(I'd like to ask what he looked like...)

But she was afraid to ask.

Because Elvis had stacks of documents towered in front of him. *I know I'm still in the way of his work, so I better refrain from asking anything else since I've already received permission. I should ask him when he has free time.*

"Thank you very much. I'll be leaving now, Otou-sama."

"Okay."

Cordelia bowed to Elvis and left the room. She turned back to look at Elvis, but he had already gone back to his paperwork.

(... I'll have Hans prepare tea for him later.)

Cordelia thought, as she returned to her room. On the way, she saw white flowers in the hallway and suddenly remembered the Witch.

(She's really is amazing.)

And she's kind. When she thought about it again, she began remembering everything that Gille had said.

『The way Sensei and Dilly laugh. You look alike.』

She felt somewhat embarrassed by those words, but also happy. *It would be nice if I grow up kind like her.*

Act 36: Visiting the Poorhouse

The next day after lunch, Cordelia called Lara to her room.

“I want to make some sachets. Could you help me?”

“I heard about it from Ronnie. I’m confident in sewing, so I might be better than you, Ojou-sama.”

“That’s reliable.”

Cordelia looked at Lara, who was teasing her, and thought, *this part of her is just like Ronnie. Lara usually does the retorting, but the master and student are really alike.* She began explaining the sample sachet bag in her hand to Lara.

The bag they were going to make was small enough to fit in the palm of a hand. The centre of the bag would be decorated with thin lacy material to easily allow the aroma to penetrate out. The bags were small, so they would all be made from scraps of cloth. Thanks to that, she could make bags in different colours.

“I don’t know. I think it’s pretty cute.”

“Isn’t it fine? I like it too.”

Cordelia smiled when Lara spoke without hesitation.

“Then, I’ll give you this. This is the first one I made.”

Cordelia was happy that she’d received a frank reply, and instead of being told she’d done well, and pushed the sachet onto Lara.

“Eh, but...”

“I wonder if it’ll become rubbish.”

“It won’t!”

“Then, take it.”

“... Thanks.”

Cordelia slowly took her hands off Lara after she’d heard that.

“Ronnie told me that you’re giving these as gifts when you go to the poorhouse.”

“Yes. I’m thinking of using chamomile and lavender. I’ll mix some flowers to increase the volume and drip some essential oil onto it to make the smell stronger. I don’t think it’ll be a pain to dispose of, even if they don’t want it.”

“I don’t think you have to worry about that... Now, let’s get started!”

Lara said, as she quickly arranged the sewing tools onto the table, and the two started working on the sachets.

Like Lara had said, she had a knack for sewing. She was accurate while cutting up the cloth and sewing them together. She was also very fast.

“Were you always good at sewing, Lara?”

“No, I just learnt it from Aisha-sensei.”



“Really? You look like you’re really used to this.”

“I do? But you’re also good at this, Ojou-sama.”

“Thanks. By the way, how is the progress with the writing tools I asked for?”

“The graphite crumbles if I cut the wooden part. But I’ve been talking with the Onee-sama’s from the magician’s wing, and it’s getting a lot better.”

“That’s good, thanks.”

“Tell me that after it’s done.”

“I will. I’m looking forward to the results.”

Cordelia could tell that the person in question wasn’t satisfied with the current results because she was pouting. Lara was very reliable.

After that, they silently focused on their work, and then Lara whispered when they had nearly completed all the sachets.

“But a poorhouse? Please tell me what kind of place it is when you get back.”

“Alright.”

Lara might also be concerned about a place like the poorhouse because of her origins. However, Lara declared firmly.

“In exchange, I’ll finish the watering and maintenance in the greenhouse while you’re away!”

She really is very reliable.

Cordelia laughed, and Lara laughed back. Then, Lara quickly pulled Cordelia’s hand.

“Here, this is for you.”

And, the thing that was given to Cordelia was a sachet. The sachet looked almost identical to the ones that they had just sown, but Cordelia’s name and a bluebird were embroidered at the edge of the bag.

“Aisha-sensei taught me that bluebirds are a symbol of good luck. I wish Ojou-sama good luck on the road you walk.”

It was a pompous remark, but her true feelings were properly conveyed by her careful embroidery.

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Five days later.

Cordelia revisited the Witch’s house with Ronnie. The day that Cordelia was making sachets with Lara, Ronnie went to the Witch to tell her that they wanted to go with her to Oulu Village. And then, the

appointed time that she had given was today, but they were leaving the Royal Capital at a later time. It was still early in the morning at that time.

Cordelia had arrived that early because the Witch had invited her to bake muffins with her.

(I think she was just joking... But I'm looking forward to it.)

She was surprised that the Witch had been serious when she had invited Cordelia to make sweets with her last time, but she had no reason to refuse the invitation, since the Witch was going to teach her how to make the muffins that she had wanted to learn how to make.

Gille and Vernoux will also be accompanying them to Oulu Village, but they will be arriving at the last minute. Incidentally, Ronnie volunteered to tend to the shop and wouldn't be making muffins.

"Well, let's start."

"Okay."

Cordelia agreed with the smiling Witch even though she was a little nervous.

"First, let's make the custard cream. Have you ever cracked an egg before, Dilly-chan? You need to separate the yolk from the white. Can you do that?"

"Yes. I can."

"Then, that's good."

I haven't cracked an egg in this world, but I have in my previous life. That experience doesn't change the fact that I know how to do it ——— Cordelia made excuses in her mind. By the way, I separated the egg yolk and whites in my previous life to use it on tsukune, but it doesn't matter now since it doesn't have anything to do with sweets. But I think my nervousness would be eased somewhat if my experience was from making sweets.

Enough of that. The Witch stared at Cordelia in admiration, and Cordelia felt, once again, that she knew that Cordelia was a noble. *The only people who haven't cracked eggs at this age are nobles or children who don't help out at home.*

(She also told me that she knew that Vernoux-sama is a noble, so it would only be natural for her to assume that I, his friend, am a noble too...)

Cordelia hadn't seen her, 『I don't like noble's attitude』 so she didn't know, but it was a little strange.

(Maybe an arrogant noble said some foolish things to Sensei.)

If that did happen, then I think it's unforgivable. Although this hasn't been established, nobles aren't people who should lord over others. I strongly resented nobles who acted like that.

However, it would have a bad influence on the muffin if I continue to be angry at something like this, so I decided not to think about it any further.

"To make custard cream, you have to mix flour, sugar and egg yolks in a bowl. Yes, like that... Then I'll pour the milk in. This milk is warm, but you can't use boiled milk."

Cordelia mixed the contents of the bowl while listening to the Witch's explanation. Then, she passed the bowl to the Witch when everything was mostly mixed together. The Witch received the bowl and poured the contents into a pot before putting it over a fire.

"From here on out, it's a matter of taste. You just need to adjust how hard it gets... This time, it's enough just to make it sloppy. It gets a little harder after it's cooled down."

"It smells delicious."

"Doesn't it just? I always want to eat it with my fingers. It tastes delicious if you spread it on bread too."

In the meantime, the custard cream was done.

Next was the muffin dough. First, crack eggs into a bowl and mix it. Then, add sugar, butter and milk. Finally, sift the flour into the bowl, and then the preparations are done. Then, mix the custard cream into the dough until it is shaped like a muffin, and then pour it into the moulds. After that, put it into the oven to bake, and then the muffins are done.

(It was easier to make than I thought.)

I feel like I can make this now that I know the mixture. Cordelia got a little confident like this, and the Witch handed her a piece of paper.

"You can take this if you want. It's today's recipe."

"Huh... Are you sure?"

"Yes. It's not a secret, and you looked like you had a lot of fun making them."

"Mm, I'm thrilled! The muffin I ate before was really delicious. Thank you."

"You're welcome. I'm glad this made you happy. Well then, let's wait for it to bake."

The Witch said, as she urged Cordelia to sit down. *This is the perfect time!* She thought as she gave the Witch two paper bags.

"Mm, I made these. I thought they would make nice gifts if you don't mind me taking them with me to the poorhouse."

"This is... a really fragrant sachet. Did you make this, Dilly-chan?"

"Yes. I had help with the other half, but the blue bag contains lavender, and the red one contains chamomile potpourri. If I can't bring them with me, then I was going to sell them at the market."

The Witch listened to Cordelia as she picked up one of the bags.

"They're well-made."

"I tried my best."

"I'm sure the girls will be thrilled. Thanks."

When Cordelia was relieved that she'd taken the bags, the Witch took cups out from the cupboard.

“Let’s have tea while we wait.”

“Mm, if you don’t mind, shall I make the tea?”

“It’s okay. I may look like this, but I’m quite good at making tea.”

And as she began preparing, a smell that simulated their appetites started drifting in the air.

Also, the muffins were done after a while, and Cordelia and the Witch tried the muffins in the name of sampling them. *The cool muffins were delicious, but freshly baked muffins are also tasty.* The Witch also gave Ronnie a muffin while she was at it, and he gave similar feedback.

When they finished eating muffins, they stuffed the rest into a basket to bring as gifts, and Vernoux and Gille came just as they were doing that. They were both out of breath.

“... Are you alright? You two?”

“Yeah. We just had a little bit of trouble.”

Are they alright or not? Which on earth is it?

However, Cordelia had a bad feeling, so she didn’t ask any further. She felt like she would be sticking her nose into others’ affairs if she asked. Let sleeping dogs lie. It was sometimes important to be the bona fide third person. And like Cordelia, Ronnie looked away.

“Then, shall we go?”

The Witch spoke in a carefree manner as she locked up the shop, then she locked the entrance and hung a sign saying that she would be absent.



There was a travelling coach near the Witch's house which they could take to go to the village. There usually aren't many customers riding the remodelled coaches, but they have been raising their profits by making purchases on behalf of the villages they visited and delivering the items there.

The coach slowly approached Oulu village while they were chatting.

There was a small stream at the entrance of Oulu Village. The village was adjacent to the forest, but the magic wasn't as thick as the forest. Therefore, monsters didn't appear much there, and they could maintain the village.

(But the magic here is still much stronger than the magic at the Royal Capital.)

They must harvest delicious vegetables and fruits, Cordelia thought as she followed the Witch and got off the carriage.

"Now, let's go."

The first place the Witch headed to was a building at the back of the village. Cordelia surveyed the village as they walked there. A moderate distance was maintained between the houses. Depending on the location, some houses had a field next to them, and some houses raised about two cows. Also, she saw scenes that she rarely had the chance to see in the Royal Capital, such as children playing on tree stumps and in sand, or middle-aged men carrying straw.

They arrived at their destination while she was observing her surroundings. *The building is made from white stone, and, to put it nicely, it looks like it has a lot of history behind it. Frankly, it feels like an old church.*

At the entrance of the building, there was a wooden signboard that indicated that it was the poorhouse.

Next to the poorhouse was a field full of fresh, green vegetables. Flowers and herbs were planted on the edges of the field for enjoyment, and there were children in straw hats plucking out weeds. There were several watering cans on the side of the well.

"Ah, it's Witch-sensei!"

"Sensei, welcome!"

The children noticed the Witch and raised a cheerful voice. The Witch greeted, "Hello," and waved her hands, then she headed straight into the building. Cordelia, Vernoux, Gille and Ronnie followed her.

The children who were inside the building were smaller than the ones outside. However, they reacted in the same way as the children outside.

"It's Witch-sensei!"

"Sensei, welcome!"

The children, who spoke with more pronounced lisps than the ones outside, rushed towards the Witch... But they stopped right away. Probably because there were strangers behind the Witch... Probably because Cordelia, Vernoux, Gille and Ronnie were there.

The children kept their distance as they peeked at the strangers, and the rear door slowly opened. And the woman who appeared was about the same height as the Witch.

“Oh my, you really brought people with you today, Green.”

“Hello, director. I put today’s snacks into this basket. And, as I’ve written in my letter, these four children are the ones who visit my shop at the Royal Capital and one of their brothers. I ended up inviting them here.”

“Welcome, ladies and gentlemen from the Royal Capital. We don’t have much, but please make yourselves at home.”

Cordelia and the others each returned the director’s welcome with a bow. Then, just when she was about to say her greetings, a child behind the director, who was hiding their face, suddenly shouted.

“Aah!! There’s a prince!”

The child’s voice resounded well throughout the room.

For a moment, silence reigned in the room as if time had stopped. Cordelia was surprised by that outrageous statement, and she moved unnaturally to follow the direction the child was pointing in.

The child’s finger was pointed at Vernoux.

As soon as Cordelia realised this, the children cheered, and they immediately surrounded Vernoux.

“Wow!! He’s really a prince!”

“Lookie, the picture book! You’re in here! The prince came out from the picture book!”

There was certainly a person who looked like Vernoux in the picture book that one of the children had quickly taken out from the bookshelf. The children were excited and shouted, “It’s the prince!”

(Vernoux-sama is the prince...?)

Now that someone mentions it, he certainly does have blonde hair and blue eyes... In other words, he does have the classic appearance of a prince.

But why?

That word doesn’t suit Vernoux-sama much. Is there a prince who would come to someone’s house to eat sweets every day? No, how could there be? The moment she thought that she wanted to burst out into laughter, but she tried her best not to. Gille, on the other hand, didn’t hold back and his shoulders were shaking as he laughed.

“We-well, you certainly look like a prince. Kuku... Are you going to be a prince today?”

“I 『certainly』 do not. Don’t laugh Gille! Ah... You know, I’m sorry, but I’m not the prince. And the prince of this kingdom has black hair. He doesn’t have blonde hair like in that picture book.”

After saying that to Gille, Vernoux told that to the children who were clinging to him.

But the children didn't listen to him at all.

"Prince, let's play tag! Let's go to the garden!"

"I said, I'm not the prince..."

"That's something a prince would say! Because you have to keep it a secret!"

"I'm not... Hey, don't pull me!"

"Prince, let's go to the garden. Quickly, hurry up!!"

"... Ok. I'll go with you if you call me Vernoux instead of Prince."

"Then, Vernoux. Let's play tag! It's so awesome to play tag with the prince!"

His request was also useless, and Vernoux was dragged outside by the children who thought he was a prince. Therefore, Vernoux was still screaming, "I'm not the prince," as he was being dragged outside.

"Oh my, Vernoux-kun is very popular."

Cordelia and Gille returned the same expression to the smiling Witch.

However, Cordelia wondered if the son of a Marquis would know how to play tag, but fortunately, he knew the rules.

"The prince is coming~!"

"Run away~!"

The cheerful screams allowed everyone to know the Vernoux was 'it', and it also conveyed that the children were so excited that they had forgotten about Vernoux's request.

"I'm going to catch all those who call me Prince!"

Vernoux screamed back at the children and was just as lively as they were... Cordelia, who had been thinking, suddenly recalled that she hadn't given a proper greeting to the director.

"I'm sorry for intruding on you. Please call me Dilly. It's very nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you. I'm sorry, the children are full of energy."

The director said as she patted the little girl who was clinging to her leg. She wasn't the child who had informed everyone that Vernoux was the prince.

The little girl looked ticklish and loosened up, then she stared at Cordelia.

"Onee-chan are you a princess?"

The words that fell from the little girl's mouth had a bit of a lisp, but it sounded cute.

And the thing that she said was just as cute as her voice, but it was something that Cordelia hadn't expected. Cordelia, who was about to freeze, slowly knelt and looked at the little girl.

“I’m Dilly. Witch-sensei is teaching me about herbs. What’s your name?”

“I’m Toto.”

“I see. That’s a cute name.”

Toto smiled at Cordelia words. Then, she released herself from the director’s legs, moved to where Cordelia was and grasped both hands firmly.

“Mm, Dilly-chan. I want to become a princess. How do I become one?”

“Hmm... I’m not a princess either, so I don’t know how to become one.”

Toto heard Cordelia’s answer and looked disappointed. *She must admire princesses a lot.* However, Cordelia hadn’t lied. *I wonder what’s wrong,* Cordelia worried, but she heard something unexpected.

“All girls are princesses.”

That was, without a doubt, Gille’s voice.

After he uttered those words, he picked Toto up in a natural way.

“So, don’t look so sad.”

Toto looked surprised, but then she immediately smiled widely. Cordelia, on the other hand, was stunned. However, Gille maintained his natural appearance.

“Oh yes... princesses look good with a flower crown. I’m sure some white clovers are blooming outside.”

“Flower crown?”

“Yup. You put it on your head.”

Toto shrieked in joy at Gille’s words.

“Director, may I take this child outside?”

“Yes, of course. Gille-kun, please look after her.”

Gille bowed and carried Toto outside. Cordelia watched them walk off and finally realised that she had been left behind when she couldn’t see them anymore.

No, it’s okay. It’s fine, but Gille-sama showed an unexpected side to him just a moment ago. I thought he was a gentleman, but lines like that come naturally to him, then he might be a lady-killer... She couldn’t help but think that.

“Hey,” a rude voice called to her then.

When Cordelia turned towards the voice, she saw Mick, who had stolen her muffin the other day.

“Oh, it’s been a while.”

Mick raised his eyebrow even more at Cordelia’s reply.

“Why are you here?”

“Because I asked Sensei.”

Mick was projecting his discomfort out and was even unwilling to apologise the other day. But still, he did apologise... Or rather, Cordelia wasn't angry and felt a bit sorry for him since he was scolded and had to apologise. Nonetheless, that doesn't change Mick's feelings.

“Did you come here to make fun of me?”

“I didn't. I never even thought about making fun of you.”

“Then, what did you come here for? This isn't a place for you to come.”

“Why can't I come here?”

“Why...?”

Mick faltered because the director and the Witch were near them. However, Cordelia could also guess that he had gone too far to pull back.

(I wonder what's wrong.)

She was worried for a moment, but then she suddenly thought of it. *Oh yeah, I never introduced myself to him.*

“Mick-kun, I'm Dilly. I'm sorry I couldn't introduce myself last time.”

“I'm not interested in your name! Anyway, why aren't you angry!?”

“Why aren't I angry...? We've already settled it, haven't we?”

Cordelia said, and Mick turned bright red. Then he snorted roughly and went to the back of the room. *Apparently, he failed to choose his words or a topic.*

“Oh my. Mick's full of energy today too.”

The director spoke in a carefree manner, and Cordelia smiled ambiguously.

Honestly, I had expected that he wouldn't welcome me. It would be difficult for him to welcome me if our meeting was unpleasant for him.

(But still, it feels bad if he steps into my space.)

But it's a different story when it comes to worrying about it. I want to talk to him a little more.

(I don't think Mick-kun is hung up about the muffin.)

If there's a reason for this, then I want to know it. I'll have to get involved with him a little more if I want to find the cause. If it's because we're incompatible, then that's it, but if I had done something to offend him, then I have to correct that... Right now, I believe that I haven't offended him. If I have, then it would only have been about the timing of my introduction...

“Don't be offended. He's just a little cautious.”

“I don't mind, but Mick-kun...”

“He’s fine. I’m sure he actually wants to talk with you. However, he’s keeping his distance because he’s a bit sensitive to separation. He’s afraid of suddenly not being able to see someone again, so he keeps people away.”

“But he already thinks of this place as his home,” the director continued.

Cordelia was at a loss for words. *That probably has to do with when he separated from his parents. But I don’t know which words are appropriate to say.*

However, the director didn’t need Cordelia’s answer.

“But I hope that Mick can talk to a lot of people. Dilly, please talk to him if you don’t mind.”

“If you’re fine with me, then I’ll try to talk to him as much as I could.”

“Thanks.”

But if I say something that would make him angry like just now, then it would only widen the gap between us. Now then, how should I talk to him? Being impatient is taboo, but how can I get him to listen to me? She wondered, and the door opened vigorously. Cordelia and the director looked at the door in surprise, and they saw Toto clenching a handful of white clovers.

“Dilly-chan. Make me a flower crown.”

“Huh?”

“Sorry, Dilly. It was harder than I thought.”

Gille appeared after Toto. He was holding a flower crown, but it only looked like a flower crown and seemed like it would fall apart at any time. It would probably break apart as soon as someone wore it onto their head.

(Has Gille-sama ever made a flower crown before...?)

Nonetheless, it’s very skilful of him to be able to make a flower crown in such a short amount of time... But the flower crown the Gille-sama had given me wasn’t constructed like a flower crown.

Cordelia smiled as she looked at Toto’s eyes sparkle.

“Then, I’ll make you a beautiful flower crown.”

Cordelia declared before curtsying to the director and Witch, then she went outside with Gille and Toto.

This was also Cordelia’s first time making a flower crown in this world, so she carefully made it while tracing her memories. Gille staring at her hands also made her nervous.

She was able to complete the crown without losing to pressure. She also praised herself, *I made it quite nicely*, and Toto’s joy was dazzling. She even went to show it off to the other children who also wanted one. Thus, Cordelia continued to make some more flower crowns for the other children. Fortunately, Gille learnt how to make one just by watching her, so he helped make the other half.



While Cordelia and Gille made the flower crowns, girls older than Toto surrounded Cordelia and looked at her in curiosity.

“Hey, Dilly-chan. Does the Prince really go incognito? Can you meet him wherever he goes? We haven’t been to the Royal Capital before.”

I hope he doesn’t, and I would have to obtain information in advance so I can avoid him if he does... Cordelia resisted saying that. But even without Cordelia’s answer, the question was quickly brushed away by another girl.

“Argh, Lana you’re always like that! Say, is it true that in the Royal Capital there’s a crystal ball that allows you to go anywhere just by peeking at it? Can you do that if you get a job at the castle? Have you heard about this Dilly-chan?”

“Lana and Tina... look at reality. It’s impossible, isn’t it? The strange thing about the Royal Capital is that some shops stay open until the next day, right? I heard that people drink alcohol there.”

“Why are they opened until so late? The Royal Capital is such a mysterious place.”

“I don’t know, but there’s a lot of people there, and it’s definitely a great place! There are also chivalrous thieves [1], who throw money into the streets, right?”

“There isn’t. Chivalrous thieves are thieves. The knights in the Royal Capital are amazing, so the thieves would be caught even before they could steal money.”

Their conversations didn’t stop. Cordelia didn’t even have time to interject before the topic was changed again. They always had conversations like that.

(But the children’s stories are a mixture of fiction and reality.)

『A crystal ball that allows you to go anywhere』 was a play performed in the Royal Capital. I don’t know how it’s related to a chivalrous thief, but I feel like the storyteller could have mentioned someone like that. If they’ve never been there, then everything is hearsay; so, they probably can’t judge what is fact and what is fiction.

“Dilly-chan?”

“Ah, sorry. What’s wrong?”

Toto called Cordelia, who was lost in the conversation.

“Dilly-chan, Toto also wants to hear about the Royal Capital. I read lots of picture books.”

“Toto-chan, can you already read?”

“I can. But not difficult ones. Amazing? Everyone has to learn how to read and write and make calculations before they graduate from here. Toto is doing her best too.’

“That’s amazing.”

Toto crossed both hands embarrassingly and glanced at Cordelia when she heard Cordelia’s reply. Cordelia placed the flower crown she was making on her knee and patted Toto’s head.

“I’ll bring you a picture book next time.”

“You will? Dilly-chan’s? You’ll come again?”

“Yes.”

“Ok, I’ll be waiting for you!”

Toto nodded when she heard Cordelia’s answer and smiled widely. Cordelia looked at her and wondered what book she should bring.

(Should I bring a simple history picture book?)

As far as I can tell, Lana-chan and the others, who are older than Toto, seem interested in the Royal Capital. If Toto-chan will be like that someday as well, then it’s a good idea to teach her about simple history first. We should have a picture book about the founding of this kingdom at the Pameradia library.

(Picture books related to national holidays will be helpful too. Most of the events at the Royal Capital are closely related to the history of the kingdom.)

I’m sure some of the information would be useful to Toto-chan in the future. Even Lana-chan and the others might be able to understand the state of the Royal Capital better if they read those books.

(No, Lana-chan and the others might not be satisfied with picture books. I wonder if they’ll like historical drama books like the ones Onee-sama left in the library.)

I can probably take out the books that Onee-sama left behind in the library if I get Otou-sama’s permission. Honestly, they should choose their own books but unfortunately, they can’t.

(It would be quick and easy if I buy a lot of books and donate them to the poorhouse, but there’s no telling what would happen after I donate once. There isn’t any reason for a noble daughter to support them that much. And the poorhouse doesn’t accept any external support.)

But it’s difficult for them to rent books from the Royal Capital. In addition to the loan fees, they will also have to pay for their fare since it’s a little far from here. How do I get rid of that? Time passed quickly as she pondered.

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In the end, Cordelia continued to ponder on the coach ride home. Gille asked on behalf of Cordelia, who was too busy pondering to talk much.

“The director calls Sensei ‘Green’, doesn’t she?”

Cordelia couldn’t help but lift her face and stare at the Witch when she heard that. There were no other passengers on the return trip, aside from Cordelia and the others, and they were basically sitting with the cargo. The Witch answered gently.

“She’s been calling me that since before she became the director.”

“Does she call you Green because of the medicinal herbs?”

“Yes. It’s already been nearly 30 years now, but there was a very contagious disease going around back then. That disease had fewer deaths than the 『Dark Winter』 10 years ago, but the prices of medicine jumped up, and it was something that we couldn’t get our hands on.”

“Sensei... did you perhaps develop new medicine?”

The Witch smiled at Gille’s question.

“I was actually living a bit more south during those times. But after I found out that the medicine I made was effective against the disease, I travelled around to different places. And when the disease came to an end, I was in Oulu. After that, I moved to the Royal Capital to set up my shop.”

“So that’s why you still have a friendly relationship with the village.”

“That’s right. When I arrived at Oulu, people called me 『Lady Green』 and it was so embarrassing. I told them, 『If it’s like that, then witch would be better』, and only the director said, 『Witch doesn’t suit you!』 ... But she compromised and called me 『Green』 instead.”

The Witch spoke happily, but Cordelia’s mind had already drifted away from her conversation.

A pharmacist who creates substitutes for existing medicine. The name which was given to her out of respect was 『Green Witch』. I don’t doubt her, but if her story is true, then she’s a skilful person who has worked everywhere... She dared to put herself away from authority.

(If not, then there shouldn’t be any reason for her to live quietly in town.)

People would probably reach out to her if they knew that such a talented person existed. Does her keeping her distance also have to do with why she doesn’t like nobles that much? She pondered and met the Witch’s eye.

“Have you gotten a feel of that place?”

“Ah, yes. Maybe just a little bit...”

“Really? That’s good.”

The Witch nodded lightly at Cordelia’s honest reply.

“The poorhouse is full of children who have lost their parents to disease, no matter where they’re from. From major illnesses to illnesses that could be cured if they had a doctor... That’s why I want to reduce the numbers and also help the children who are left behind.”

The Witch’s voice was clear, and it also reminded Cordelia of what the director had said about Mick.

At the same time, however, Cordelia felt uncomfortable with the Witch’s tone. The Witch’s voice sounded strange; as if she was pressuring herself. And the Witch’s gaze had fallen to her feet before Cordelia had realised.

“... Sensei?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I was a little dazed. You guys also have to maintain a healthy body so that you don’t get sick, okay?”

The aura which Cordelia had felt earlier from the smiling Witch had already disappeared. Cordelia couldn’t ask her about it any further.

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When Cordelia and the others returned to the Royal Capital, the sky had already been painted red.

“You can come with me to Oulu Village again if you don’t mind. But it’s a little far, so I won’t force you to.”

The Witch informed them when they got off the coach, and they separated from the Witch.

Cordelia, Vernoux, Gille and Ronnie were all going to the front of their meeting place, the fountain, before separating and going to the Pameradia and Flantheim mansions, so they didn’t say anything and started walking.

Then, Vernoux muttered.

“... Speaking of 30 years ago, the situation with the North got pretty bad as well. Even the prices of general goods soared.”

“That’s right.”

Gille agreed with Vernoux and continued speaking.

“I also looked a bit into the former Baron who used to support Oulu Village. In conclusion, he was using various ways to make money, so that he could buy political power. He gave almost no real support to the poorhouse, and he falsified expenses. He used it as a camouflage so that people wouldn’t think that he was a greedy Baron.”

“He’s scum.”

“But it seems that his downfall wasn’t caused by the falsified expenses. Apparently, someone complained anonymously.”

Vernoux frowned as Gille continued. Cordelia finally understood after she heard all this.

“So that’s why they wouldn’t accept outside support, even though the Baron has met his downfall.”

“Probably. Nobles who used them as slush funds aren’t worth believing. The voices coming from the kingdom might also sound the same to them.”

“If you find one rotten potato, then you’ll try to find if there are others around too. But if it’s a rotten noble, then that village has no means of confirming whether there are others. It’s natural for them to be suspicious of all nobles.”

However, Vernoux's voice didn't sound as if he had accepted that; instead, he sounded irritated. His aura felt different from the usual carefree Vernoux.

But his appearance was reliable as a friend.

"But Sensei invited us there even though she had realised that we are nobles. I don't think she was expecting us to agree, but I don't think it's without meaning either. If so, then she must want us to think about what we can do... right?"

Cordelia smiled at the two. Gille nodded, and Vernoux shrugged.

"... You're really eccentric."

"Yes, but so is Vernoux-sama who accompanies me."

I don't know what I can do yet, but nothing will happen if I don't think about it. Cordelia decided that she had to understand it first and think about what she could do. Then, she suddenly remembered.

"... Which reminds me, I discovered something surprising today."

"What is it?"

"Gille-sama seems surprisingly used to seducing women."

With those words, Gille and Vernoux stopped moving. She felt as if she could hear a sound that she didn't often hear even if she didn't speak[2]. However, Vernoux first broke the silence. He burst into laughter at Gille, who was still frozen, and held his stomach as he laughed.

"Hey... Why are you laughing, Vernoux? Deny it!"

"Ca-cause... if I don't laugh now, then when should I laugh?!?! Hey Dilly, where'd you see that?"

"Mm... When he was talking to Toto. He just naturally said 『Princess』. It's a word you don't use in everyday conversation, right?"

"Did he say that? Ah, too bad I wasn't there. But, kuku... don't worry, he's never seduced anyone before."

"If he said it unintentionally, then it makes me feel uneasy..."

What if he grows up to be a pick-up artist? No, what if he accidentally picks up girls without meaning to? It's good, to be honest, but I'm anxious. I will just pray that he won't suffer from a woman's grudge and get stabbed.

But Cordelia's reply made Vernoux laugh harder.

Finally, Gille pouted and opened his mouth.

"That's my mother's favourite phrase... I'll be careful."

So, it is normal for him to say that. I didn't want to say anything wrong, but I feel a little sorry for him, since he seems a little depressed.

"B-but you made Toto smile with your words."

“... That’s sly of you to say.”

Gille still seemed a bit depressed, but he smiled in a troubled way. Then, he exchanged glances with Cordelia and raised his voice as if he had suddenly remembered, “Ah...”

“Oh yeah, I’ll give you this.”

“A book? For me?”

“No, that’s my notebook... But it’s not the notebook, I put this inside.”

Gille said while flipping through the notebook. Then, his hands stopped, “I found it,” as he picked up something from the page. Cordelia tilted her head while wondering what it was and Gille held out his hand.

“Here, this.”

“This is... a four-leaf clover?”

“Dilly, you might already know this, but it brings luck. But if you just take the leaf, then it’ll get damaged, so bring it home together with my notebook.”

“Th-thank you very much.”

Gille, who was basking in the light of the reddening sun, looked gentle. Cordelia received the notebook while feeling that he was a little restless, then she looked at the notebook again and thought.

(Gille-sama’s airheadedness might get worse.)

She looked at his face, and he was smiling happily. *What is this?* She felt strangely embarrassed.

However, Vernoux destroyed those restless feelings.

“By the way, rumours are saying that if you throw it away, then you’ll be unhappy.”

“... Vernoux, you don’t have to say that right now.”

“No, she would be shocked if she knew about that after she’d throws it away.”

“... Don’t worry, I won’t throw it away. I’ll make it into a bookmark when I get home.”

“Thought so. Aren’t you happy, Gille?”

Vernoux ran away while teasing Gille, “See you later, Dilly.” Gille also quickly chased after him, but he quickly turned back.

“See you!”

“Take care.”

Cordelia waved as she saw them off.

After they left, she turned around.

“Ronnie, shall we go home too?”

“Yes.”

“Oh yeah, you were really quiet today.”

“My turn never showed up. Well, it’s a good thing as an escort.”

Ronnie said as he quickly walked home with Cordelia.

Dusk was already falling.

↑ **1** like Robin Hood

↑ **2** as the phrase, ‘could hear a pin drop’

Act 37: Apprentice Teacher, Ojou-sama

A few days after Cordelia's first visit to Oulu Village.

Cordelia decided to revisit the poorhouse with two books. Of course, she would be visiting with the Witch and Ronnie. Unfortunately, Vernoux and Gille were busy, so they could only see them off and wouldn't be going to Oulu Village with them.

The presents Cordelia chose for Toto was a story about a princess who lived about 100 years prior. The story was about the youngest daughter of the king from that time. She decided to study medicine, which was rare for a princess, and she built a lot of medical facilities. Toto would enjoy that book if she were interested in princesses.

The other book was chosen for Lana and the others and was a diary of a court lady who worked at the royal castle. Although it was a little old, the court lady, who accompanied the queen when she got married and started working at the royal palace, wrote about the kingdom's customs and how they came about; she also wrote about the history and other surprising things. There weren't many difficult words in the book, so it would be easy for children to read, even if they didn't have prior knowledge.

"Toto really likes Dilly-chan. When I went to the village the other day, she asked me many times if you were there."

"That... makes me really happy, but I'm sorry."

"You don't have to be sorry. But do talk to her more."

The Witch had said, and Cordelia laughed and nodded.

"How often do you visit the village, Sensei?"

"It depends on the season, since I visit for the medicinal herbs that are cultivated in the village's fields. Of course, I cultivate the difficult herbs at the back of my shop, and I do pay for the herbs they provide me with. Ah, but there are a lot of kids who catch colds in winter, so I visit quite a lot. So, I guess the number of times I visit doesn't change much throughout the year."

The Witch laughed.

"I think that the capital is also a convenient place, and it's wonderful to meet a lot of people, but I like the country air. The sounds of the trees swaying, and the chirping of the birds are different from the royal capital, aren't they?"

"Yes, I like it too."

"Dilly-chan, do you leave the royal capital often?"

"I don't go far, but I often visit the forest. I've been to Schiwiel Forest since I was little."

"The forest? I never expected that you were a tomboy."

The surprised Witch said worriedly, "Don't do anything dangerous," and Ronnie followed up, "Yeah." In the meantime, the coach reached the village.

The sky was clear now, but the whole village was humid, probably due to the light rain in the morning. The water droplets on the trees and flowers were shining brightly in the light.

Cordelia, Ronnie and the Witch made their way on the same road as last time to the poorhouse.

As soon as they arrived, Toto came running up to Cordelia while screaming happily.

“It’s Dilly-chan!”

“Hello, Toto-chan.”

“Hello!”

Toto’s energetic greeting was also directed at the Witch and Ronnie. Her attitude was completely different from the frightened one she had displayed when they had first met. After her greetings, Toto stared at the cloth bag that Cordelia was holding.

“Is the picture book in there?”

“Yes. Let’s read it together.”

“Ok! You know, Toto wanted to talk to Dilly-chan today, so she did her best around the house!”

“Thank you,” Cordelia said to the boastful Toto. She was happy that Toto was looking forward to her visit.

Cordelia was dragged by Toto to a slightly low table at the back of the room. There were no chairs, and they would be sitting directly on the spread-out cloth. She had never seen anything like that in this world, and it looked close to a low dining table.

How nostalgic, she thought as she was quickly urged by Toto to sit down. She opened the picture book. Toto’s eyes were sparkling, and Cordelia could even feel pressure from them. *I have to be careful not to fumble while I’m reading*, she laughed bitterly inside. But three girls approached them before she could start reading.

They were Lana and the others who spoke to her while she was making the flower crowns.

“Dilly-chan, thanks for the sachet the other day. I was surprised because it smelled like the flowers were blooming. Witch-sensei told me that you made it.”

“Hello, Lana-chan. I’m satisfied if you like it.”

“I do, and... is that a picture book from the royal capital?”

“Yes, I promised Toto-chan that I would bring it for her. Do you want to read with us, Lana-chan?”

She also brought a book for Lana-chan and the other two girls and was going to give it to them, but they were so focused on the picture book, so she decided to invite them to read the picture book. However, Lana quickly drew back at Cordelia’s invitation.

“I’ve already graduated from picture books! But... it is a very beautiful picture book.”

Lana seemed interested in the picture book even though she denied it with all her power.

(I wonder... if she's at the age where she wants to act like an older sister.)

I could pass her the diary of the court lady now, but Lana-chan might regret not reading the picture book. Cordelia moved from where she was sitting and urged Lana and the others to sit down with her hands.

“Are you good at reading aloud? I’m not really used to it.”

“I am!”

Lana immediately slipped into the spot when Cordelia tempted her. Tina, and the other girl who was with her, sat opposite to Toto.

“I’ll read when Lana gets tired!”

“Me too!”

Cordelia was relieved to see them act like that and watched as Lana read aloud. Lana’s reading was a bit theatrical, but she read so well that one wouldn’t think that it was the first book she’d read. Cordelia concluded that her choice had been correct when she saw the children lean into the picture book.

When the book reached the end, Toto cried.

“Toto wants to become a doctor!!”

“Idiot, you can’t become a doctor if you’re not smart.”

“Then, Toto will become smart!”

Cordelia was going to take back the picture book from Lana as she listened to the children’s interaction... but the book was pulled back before she could get her hands on it.

“Mm, can I read this one more time?”

“Yes, of course. But I actually have another book for you.”

“Huh?”

“I actually brought a book for Lana-chan too. You seemed interested in the royal capital and the palace so...”

“Oh, let me borrow it! I’ll read it by the time Dilly-chan has to go home!”

The girls were attracted by Lana’s voice, and they shifted their eyes from Toto to Lana.

“That’s not fair, Lana. I’ll read it too!”

“Me too!”

The girls surrounded the book in the blink of an eye, put their heads together and began reading out loud together. Meanwhile, Cordelia was also badgered by Toto to read the first picture book she’d seen. She was worried about whether she did a good job, but Toto was satisfied and said, “One more time,” and requested the Cordelia read a second time. Also, Toto asked that she read it once more after she’d

finished the second time, and when she had finished reading the book three times, Lana pulled on her arm.

“Say, Dilly-chan. Are you good at studying?”

“Eh?”

“This book is fascinating. If you normally read books like this, then I want you to teach me. The woman in this book is from a foreign kingdom, isn’t she? But even I didn’t know about the things that she was surprised about.”

“By any chance... are you asking me to be a teacher?”

“Yep. ‘Cause I don’t have the chance to learn about these things. If possible, I’d rather learn about more recent things... but I’m also interested in the olden days.”

“Oh, I want to hear about them too! It seems really fun to have Dilly-chan teach a class like the other teachers!”

The girls also surrounded Cordelia and conveyed their wish to her. The three girls got excited and talked about what they wanted to learn. But, for better or for worse, Cordelia didn’t know if she could teach them without permission.

She worried about how to tell them that, and a gentle voice interrupted them, “Don’t ask for too much.” It was the director.

“Dilly-chan lives in the royal capital. It’s not easy for her to come here, and she’s not an adult, even though she is a little older than you.”

The director said, and Lana and the girls looked depressed. Cordelia panicked.

“I don’t mind if the director says it’s alright. Of course, I can’t visit every day, but I can visit whenever it’s convenient.”

Yes, I wasn’t going to turn them down. Cordelia quickly said, and the director was surprised.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I was going to review it myself, and I won’t let Lana and the girls suffer any losses.”

Knowledge becomes power. Knowledge can broaden the way you think about things, and they want to learn. I want to help them if I can.

(I might have found what I can do.)

“I see,” the director cast her eyes down, and then looked Cordelia in the eyes.

“There’s a blackboard in the room at the back. We use that room to teach the kids letters and arithmetic. You can use that room as you please.”

“Thank you very much. But there is something I’m worried about...”

“What is it?”

“I’ve never taught anyone before. I’m embarrassed for talking big, but I don’t think I would be very good at it.”

The director widened her eyes at Cordelia and then laughed.

“We’ll need to be taught, if you’re good at it from the start. But don’t worry. After all, you’re so passionate about it that you would travel all the way here to teach them,” the director joked.

“Then I’ll have to tell you our schedule here,” she said as she told Cordelia a rough schedule of the poorhouse.

The children usually clean, do the washing, and fieldwork in the morning. Then, they have lunch. There were a lot of small children there, so they also took naps, especially on hot days. On the other hand, children at the age where they have more stamina studied letters and arithmetic, and they also had time to play.

The older children did job training, for the job they wished to have, once every two days... They worked part-time. The jobs covered a lot of ground, such as helping at a villager’s field, taking care of animals, or sewing. They also went to the royal capital, on the days that they weren’t working, to sell vegetables at the market.

“Besides going to sell vegetables, they also go to the royal capital to run errands at Green’s shop. They get to stretch their wings out a bit more, because some villagers go with them, unlike with the kids who sell vegetables.”

“Then, Mick-kun must have been running an errand when I met him.”

“Yes. The three girls who badgered you also had the chance to go to the royal capital... but they’re scared when they’re not together, so they haven’t been yet. It’s difficult to ask the villagers to lead three of them,” the Director laughed nervously.

They want to go to the royal capital, but they were probably worried about going to a place they didn’t know. It’s not like I can’t understand how they feel. If so, then I want to teach them a little more about the royal capital to ease their fears...

“I will contact you at a later date. Is that alright?”

Cordelia, at least, knew her own schedule.

However, it was still better to get Elvis’s approval. She hardly needed his consent for one lesson, and she couldn’t think of a reason for him to refuse.

(But if I do a good job teaching, then Lana and the girls might want me to teach more.)

One class might not be enough for some subjects if I’m going to teach in a classroom-style. I might need to continue. I’ve finally found something I can do. So, I also want to teach with proper structure. I’ve studied before, but I’ve never taught. I will need to prepare carefully if I’m going to be teaching under those circumstances.

“Of course. Thanks.”

The Director said, and Cordelia patted her chest.



That night, Cordelia explained all that to Elvis. But he didn't agree immediately and frowned.

"I certainly heard that you were going to visit the poorhouse, and I asked what you would gain from it. But didn't you want to study herbs?"

Elvis didn't talk about the pros and cons of teaching at the poorhouse. On the other hand, she couldn't deny that this was different from the purpose she had when she'd first visited the Witch.

"You want to be a teacher?"

"No."

"Acting on whims does not lead to good results."

Cordelia felt surprised when she heard Elvis.

She could understand the meaning of his words, and they were justifiable. But Elvis usually points out the problems before he refuses. Cordelia was surprised that he hadn't done that. However, she couldn't withdraw just because she was surprised. There were times when she would need to give up, but, at least, that wasn't now.

"Of course, I can't teach all the time. However, I want to interact with the girls who are throwing themselves at what they want, to find what support I could provide them. Fortunately, I still have time. I won't neglect my own studies because of this reason."

I can't afford to back down.

Cordelia declared again to get permission. She had to turn her might into allies to turn over his negative words. Otherwise, she felt like she was going to lose her spirit.

"... The longest you can teach them is for two season changes."

"Thank you very much."

Cordelia didn't know if her feelings got through to him. But she had gotten a longer delay than she had expected. She had half a year. If she could achieve some results... if she could find some evidence that she had made Toto, Lana and the girls happy, then that will surely be proof that she had moved forward.

(Otou-sama gave me half a year, so it's not like he doesn't have any expectations at all.)

If so, then I need to meet his expectations. But I won't get too worked up. I'm not alone. I can probably get Gille-sama and Vernoux-sama involved in this. They might be able to give me good ideas and tips from a different perspective.

Cordelia returned to her room after she'd excused herself. However, she couldn't rest even if she had obtained permission.

“First, I have to think about what kind of teacher I want to be.”

Unfortunately, Cordelia has never had any teaching experience in her previous life, even as a part-time job. In this world, she had only had one-on-one lessons with her tutors, but she remembered from when she was a student that there were different ways to proceed with a class.

“I want to focus on the main things as much as possible... but it would be more fun if I also taught about trivial things.”

However, that was only easy to say, so she had to first start by selecting a textbook to use.

Cordelia thought about focusing on the history books that she had learnt from, but her knowledge went beyond what was required for commoners. Also, the children couldn't take lessons as often as Cordelia, so she really needed to choose a book carefully.

Cordelia thought as she made materials. At the same time, she thought about consulting with Aisha about how to teach a class. Although Aisha didn't teach history, she was a teacher at Caina Village, and she did teach Lara, so she was the easiest teacher to talk to.

The next day, Cordelia sent a letter to Aisha and received a reply on the same afternoon. Aisha's response was pleasant, and she said that she would visit the Pameradia mansion tomorrow if it were convenient for Cordelia. Cordelia also immediately replied.

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The next day.

Aisha showed up at the Pameradia mansion with sweets.

“Long time no see, Cordelia-sama.”

“Aisha-oneesama. I'm sorry for asking too much.”

“Absolutely not! I'm delighted that you asked me. Please contact me immediately if there's anything I can help you with. Especially since this is my forte.”

Cordelia guided Aisha to the parlour while listening to her reassuring words.

“Lara was also looking forward to seeing you today.”

“I'm looking forward to seeing her too. She's a diligent child.”

“She is. But she gets angry whenever I tell her that.”

They arrived at the parlour while joking around. Cordelia knocked on the door before opening it, and Lara quickly walked to the entrance from the middle of the room. Cordelia had told her to wait in the room, so she had probably been nervous and loitered around.

“Lara, Aisha-oneesama is here.”

“Long time no see, Lara.”

“It’s been a while, Aisha-sensei!”

Lara’s voice gradually cracked and showed her tension. However, her actions were beautiful and weren’t inferior to how she usually conducted herself. Lara bowed and met Aisha’s eyes, but her next words didn’t come out easily.

After a short while, the words that came out of her mouth was of her leaving.

“Then, please excuse me. I will bring some tea later.”

Cordelia was surprised that she had left straight away, even though she had been so excited yesterday. But when she saw that Lara’s ears had turned red, she turned to Aisha. Aisha smiled wryly and met Cordelia’s eyes.

“I’m glad that she was more welcoming than I thought she would be. I’m looking forward to tasting the tea she prepares.”

Aisha said, after Lara left, and Cordelia agreed. She had probably been too nervous to say anything. But, at the same time, Cordelia was jealous because that was proof that their relationship was good.

(I also want to teach a class that they’ll always remember.)

To do this, I must first convey my thoughts to Aisha-oneesama and get her opinions on it. Cordelia decided and began consulting with Aisha.

Her consultation with Aisha also included a break with Lara and lasted until evening.

On her way home, Aisha suggested that she give Lara a mock lesson so that her vision could be finalised.

That was something extremely embarrassing for Cordelia because she would be teaching someone she knew well. She was also anxious that Lara would be disappointed because she had been taught by Aisha.

(No. She should be honest. The children of Oulu Village don’t want a class that is boring or difficult to understand.)

If I can have mock lessons, then I shouldn’t let this opportunity go. I don’t have the luxury to let it go.

Lara cheerfully accepted Cordelia’s request. But she also seemed confused and embarrassed at that point. But when they actually entered the class, they concentrated on the lesson and weren’t bothered by the fact that they knew each other. Thus, Cordelia’s anxiety eased a little after class. After that, she continued to consult with Aisha and asked Lara to join her mock lessons. Her preparations were proceeding.



Cordelia's class gradually took shape as she prepared for it little by little, and she also talked to Vernoux about the class when he came over as usual to eat sweets.

"... You really are whimsical Dilly. Did you prepare for it?"

She smiled wryly at Vernoux, who was twisting his fork in his brownie.

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"I know you're preparing for the class, but have you not been to the Witch's place?"

"No, I have, since I have things I want to ask her. I also borrowed new books yesterday."

Yesterday, she had stopped by the Witch's place after Aisha had visited and borrowed two books; one on medicinal plants and the other on marine plants. Cordelia passed the book about marine plants to Ronnie after she'd read through it once.

Ronnie had been researching about oblaat whenever he didn't go out. He seemed very troubled: "This doesn't melt well," "It'll be stuck like this," "Can't it get any thinner?" or "Do I need to improve the drying tool?" Cordelia had warned him not to overdo it, and Lara cautioned him, "Don't think of it as a toy just because it's easy."

Ronnie even seemed to have missed lunch today, and he kept glaring at his book with a sandwich in hand. He appeared unusually concentrated. She was certainly happy that this touched Ronnie's heartstrings, but she was also a little worried that he would get sick.

"It seems like you're worried about a lot of things."

"I am."

Vernoux was referring to the class, but he wasn't wrong either, so she agreed. The brownie on Vernoux's plate disappeared before she even noticed it.

"Well, our schedules will eventually match up, so we can go to Oulu Village together. Then, I'll enjoy watching your strenuous efforts."

"It's not a show. But I'm still shocked by the things that happened last time."

"What? Are you referring to Gille's flirting?"

"No, well, there is that. But I can't believe that you were called a prince..."

She felt like she was going to laugh thoughtlessly just by remembering it... but she didn't say that and showed Vernoux her best smile. Vernoux frowned for a moment but immediately replied with a provocative smile.

"Are you disappointed that I'm not the prince?"

"Aren't you the one who's disappointed? If you were the prince, then you wouldn't need to go out to eat sweets, now would you?"

“No, I don’t know? The prince might also be pitiful, you know?”

They both didn’t want to give up the conversation initiative to each other, so they clung to their fake smiles. But that didn’t last long. Vernoux shrugged first.

“... Well, invite me as you see fit if you want to do something.”

“Oh my, are you sure?”

She was planning to get him involved, but she hadn’t expected that he would offer first. But, Vernoux didn’t mind and nodded.

“Yeah. Gille’s thinking about various ways to help them.”

“Then, do you also have any ideas?”

“I plan on helping, but it’s hard for me to actively help them. It might be excessive to talk about our fief... I don’t think I’ll have enough time to figure out what the other person wants.”

Vernoux smiled bitterly. He is the legitimate child, and although he could make time to go out incognito, he was actually swamped.

“Gille is pretty busy, so he’ll be happy if you reach out to him first. If you leave him alone, he’ll likely pull all-nighters.”

“Oh my, then please tell Gille-sama not to overdo it, first. I can’t ask him to collapse.”

“Ok. He’ll probably overdo it if I tell him that, but I’ll tell him.”

If so, then should you not tell him? Cordelia continued to question as Vernoux left.

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A few days after, Cordelia headed back to Oulu Village. She brought with her an explanation sheet, instead of a homemade textbook, and her tension.

Waiting for Cordelia at Oulu Village was Lana and the other two girls who had read the court lady’s diary.

To be precise, Toto also said, “Toto will listen too!” so she was in the classroom, but she soon drifted into the dream world. It was still too early for her to take lessons. However, she looked satisfied when the class had finished, and she felt like an older sister.

The class itself generally consisted of the girl’s surprised voices, “Ooooh!” and Cordelia was relieved that she was able to draw their interests.

As evidence, she had another student when she taught her second class a few days later. The fourth student was a boy who was looking curiously at the notes that the other three were looking at. He was quieter than Lana and the girls, and attended class while smiling. However, he was good friends with

Mick and was taken away by him when he intruded on the class. But the boy also wasn't weak, and he returned to the class in the end.

When she was going home, Cordelia asked Mick if he would like to join in on the lessons, but he glared at her. It was still challenging for her to talk with Mick.

The next time she visited, Vernoux and Gille also came along after so long.

However, she didn't have a class scheduled in for the day, and they planned to help the director. Gille looked disappointed, but Cordelia was relieved, since they weren't going to watch her lesson.

They were repairing the tools the children used when they went to the royal capital market, and also making goods. They were mending the cloth used to decorate the shop, making new boxes to put the goods in, and making wreaths. The director made the base of the wreath from branches collected from the nearby forest. Then, they would be decorated with things such as ribbons, dried flowers, dried fruits, wood beads or buttons. The ribbons, wood beads and buttons were dabbed with cotton, which was soaked in plant dye. They sold well next to the vegetables.

"It's a beautiful colour."

"It's dyed with peanuts. Only the shell is a little bright, and the darkest part is the skin. You can mix the shell and skin together to get a brighter colour. There are items dyed with clover too."

Cordelia was a little far from the children, and she was using scissors with the director to make ribbons. Vernoux and Gille were using hammers and nails to make repairs. They weren't used to doing that kind of work, but they still worked carefully.

"Say, what colour do you think would be nice to dye this?"

Cordelia hesitated a little when asked by the director. *The cloth in my hands is a calm tea colour. It goes well with the wreath, but if I had to think about other colours... then what colour would be nice?*

"If you dye this in mint, then you could also enjoy the aroma. If you want something brighter, then you could use chamomile. But for wealth, it's a little expensive, but dying it in pink with red roses will make it more vibrant. If you want a moderate dye, then the skin of grapes will make it a beautiful light purple."

You can dye the cloth yellow-green with mint stems and leaves using an alum. Chamomile will make it a brighter yellow. You can use dry or fresh herbs as long as you adjust the quantity.

The director heard Cordelia's reply and groaned, "Hmmm."

"It's not enough to just have brown colours after all. I added some warm colours with dried flowers, but I want them to be more vibrant."

"No, that wasn't what I meant... I just thought if you had to use a different colour. All the colours you have now are lovely."

“The colours became like this when I started using what we had left... Oh, yes, let’s think about it for a moment. I think we can collect the grape skins depending on the season. But I’m surprised you also know about dying, Dilly-chan.”

“I can’t calculate the cost since I don’t know how to use it for commercial purposes, but I do know a little.”

“Cost, huh. But... oh yes, for example, we could use it on something like a shawl and use that at the end of wreaths instead of just using ribbons. Then we might be able to increase our budget a little bit...”

The director muttered at the end as if she was talking to herself while cutting the ribbon with the scissors.

“I almost forget that you’re a kid when I talk to you, Dilly-chan.”

“I am a child, but I’m already 12 years old. I’m a little older than Toto-chan and the girls.”

“Vernoux-kun and Gille-kun are also level-headed. The kids here already recognise them as older brothers.”

The director said, as she looked over at the two who were still working while being treated like children.

“Lana and the girls really enjoy your classes, Dilly-chan. Thanks.”

“I’m honoured that I could be of use.”

“We really want to teach them more. But we can’t keep the place running if we don’t make money...”

The director said as she sighed.

“... Do you think it’s bad to get help?”

“You know about it, right? About what happened?”

“Yes.”

Cordelia looked the director in the eyes and answered.

The director stared back at Cordelia and began speaking.

“Honestly, they were too wilful back then. I was still only a helper. But it’s too late to ask for help now... We’re making a living somehow, and the villagers are helping us out. I think we’ve made a really nice place.”

“I can tell by looking at the children.”

“That’s good. But when I see the happy faces of Lana and the others, I can’t help but think that I could do more for them. Sometimes I wonder if things are alright the way they are. Even though I have to get it together.”

The director’s words sounded as if she was telling herself, rather than Cordelia. She felt like the image of the director overlapped with the Witch’s.

“... It’s difficult for me to understand your conflict, Director-sensei. However, circumstances change over time, and it’s normal for your ideals to waver. History always teaches us that our values and the world are always changing. I think the same could be said for individuals.”

“...”

“There may be times when being constant is important. But why don’t you consult with someone you trust if you’re worried? It’s never too late to ask for help.”

Cordelia couldn’t say, “Please talk about this with me.” The most suitable person for the director to talk to was the Witch.

“... That’s right. I’ve never had a proper talk with Green.”

The director muttered as if talking to herself and a voice came from outside, “The fish peddler is here~!” The director looked up.

“Oh, the peddler is here.”

“There’s a fish peddler?”

“Yes. You can get to a river here, but you can’t get fresh fish. We can get small dried fish, which are hard to sell in the royal capital, for cheap. Dilly-chan, do you want to buy some to take home too?”

“No. I’ll refrain.”

Cordelia watched as the director walked to where the peddler was.

(Come to think of it, they said that coaches from the royal capital also make money by peddling.)

Cordelia watched as the peddler talked to the director, through the window, while thinking so, and she suddenly came up with an idea.

“... Oh yeah, I can just make it mobile.”

Cordelia muttered.



After returning to the royal capital, they separated from the Witch as usual, and Cordelia asked Gille and Vernoux.

“Do you have a little time now?”

“What is it?”

“I’d like to talk to you two about something.”

“Time is time. If it’s short, then it should be fine.”

Vernoux answered, and Gille nodded.

“Then, I’ll just talk about one thing. A route to carry books to villages and lend them out... I would like to build a mobile library. Would you help me?”

“Hah?”

“Mobile library?”

Vernoux and Gille replied respectively, and Cordelia nodded.

“Yes. It would be smaller than a rental bookshop, which also operates as a store, but there are only a few ways the villages could obtain books. If possible, I would also like to arrange a teacher who could answer the children’s questions about the books.”

“Could you tell me a little bit more?”

Gille urged, and Cordelia continued.

“The children at Oulu Village know the bare essentials of reading and writing, but all the books at the poorhouse are old, and it’s hard for them to obtain new ones. But some children want to learn. So, I want to create an environment where they could rent new books for free... or even at the lowest price. It would be ideal if they could go around to each of the villages like with the coaches.”

“In short, it won’t be limited to that poorhouse?”

“That’s right. If possible, I want the library to go around several villages regularly to lend out books. This support will be provided to remote areas, as well, and is not limited to the poorhouse.”

Gille nodded at Cordelia’s reply.

“If the villages are around the royal capital, then the children should have been taught the bare essentials of reading and writing, even if they’re from mountain villages. But they don’t have many opportunities to practice it, so they would probably be happy about this.”

Vernoux still had his arms crossed as he said, “Oh, so it’s like that?”

“If we support the villages and not just the poorhouse, then it would be easier for them to use it, even if they’re refusing support. But how will you procure the books and carriages?”

“It’s difficult to say that we could manage the carriages and get new books at any time, no matter how much money we have. Therefore, I would like to think of it as a continuous project, and if possible, I would like to create an organisation to gather supporters and obtain funds and opinions from them every year. If we do that, then it would be different from doing it alone. We could collect people’s opinions and reduce bias.”

“So that’s why you wanted to talk to us?”

“Yes. However, I haven’t calculated the initial costs or how much budget this project would require per year. It’s just... will you help me if I have a proper plan in place?”

Cordelia asked, and Vernoux put his hand on his chin to think.

“You could probably gather enough funds if you ask people if they want to do welfare work. If it’s not an absurd amount, then the pride of nobles won’t allow them to say, ‘How come that House’s child is participating but not mine?’ . It would be easy to accomplish if we use the Flantheim and Pameradia name. I don’t mind helping if you have a solid plan in place.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Also... yes. Some merchants in the royal capital want to make big donations to gain fame. Of course, they probably expect to get the chance to associate with nobles... If you can use them well, then you’ll also have enough money to hire some founding staff.”

“You know a lot about this.”

“I interact with more people than you, Dilly.”

“Is this, perhaps, the result of being dragged by the Marquis to marriage interviews?”

“...You... you’re grateful, aren’t you?”

She felt like he hadn’t yelled because his face was twitching, but also because they were outside. But, Vernoux didn’t seem to care.

“Gille will help out too, right? We’ll get a great result just by you agreeing with me.”

Vernoux grinned, and Gille smiled wryly in return.

“It might be painful if I can only do that much. I’d be happy to help if there’s anything else.”

“Oh yes, I heard from Vernoux-sama that you are also thinking about how to help the poorhouse.”

When she said that, Gille looked at Vernoux vigorously, and Vernoux turned away at the same speed. He looked as if he would start whistling.

(Perhaps, Gille-sama wanted to keep that a secret.)

After a moment of silence, Gille finally sighed deeply. His sigh said that there was no use in complaining to Vernoux now.

“... If they need it, then I hope that it would be easier for them to find jobs in the royal capital. On the other hand, if they have job offers at the village, then I want to build an information network that would

make it easier to reach the capital. I looked it up, but at the moment there doesn't seem to be any information networks that spread widely between villages and the royal capital... I want to create a job search information spot."

"I see."

"But if we carry out the mobile library plan, then we'll need a base to manage books in the royal capital. I just thought that it would be convenient if I could just use that. About the staff... I'll think of something."

What he said at the end was vague, but he was firm. Cordelia and Gille looked at each other and laughed.

But they were stopped by a single word from Vernoux.

"Well, we can take that slowly. Either way, how about we put this in order?"

"I should inform His Highness about this, but it won't be a problem."

"Huh..."

"It's not, huh. It would be strange for me to do something near the royal capital without saying anything when I'm by the prince's side."

"Well, that's true... wouldn't it be a bit excessive to tell the prince?"

"It's not like I'm forcing him to help us. I'm just going to tell him about your idea. Just do what you want."

Things can indeed be done with one command, even if he does lend us a hand... or instead, I feel like things would be complete with just one command. If I think of him as someone I could use, then I should use him.

But... I don't want to at all. I'm doing my best to stop my cheeks from twitching.

(... No. I'm not going to tell him not to, just because I don't like the prince.)

That's right. Let's explain it clearly.

He's not asking for direct help. Vernoux-sama is just going to mention this to the prince. Perhaps, Vernoux-sama is just trying to create the fact that the prince endorses this.

"If you want, you could also be there, Dilly."

"No, I'll leave that to you, Vernoux-sama. It's impossible for me to appear in front of the prince when I don't go out in public much... The higher-ups and young ladies will get really noisy."

"Alright. It's unfortunate, but I'll do it."

Cordelia said nothing more to Vernoux, who raised his hands and shrugged. *He had probably predicted this. His bitter smile is proof.*

She pretended that she didn't hear him say carefreely, "Well, we can take it slowly," with the bitter smile still on his face.



After that, Cordelia visited the village and met with Vernoux many times to get the preliminary arrangements done.

She found out that Vernoux was unexpectedly strict.

Cordelia thought that he would work out the details after listening to her rough presentation, but Vernoux pressed her with questions. 『How are you deciding the standard of the books?』 and 『Will you do an external audit of the receipts?』 She hadn't prepared some of the answers the first time and felt like she had lost a bit.

Of course, she was fully aware that this wasn't a competition. *I can't say that up until now Onee-san has... I don't plan on holding Vernoux-sama back. Even this time, I was thinking about the future, and I haven't forgotten. But the only response I got from him was, "That's too late."*

"How can I lose to him?"

The words she had uttered when she was in her room alone were probably the rudest words she had ever said. But, since no one was there, she told herself that she would be pardoned.

But thanks to that, I was able to improve my plans for the books and how to manage them. I got a little bit too energetic, and some of my writing turned out a bit too forceful, but that's still charming.

Cordelia suddenly looked at the ceiling and closed her eyes. She saw the smiles of Toto and Lana in her mind.

"... I'll hold out for a little longer."

Cordelia corrected her posture as she spoke to herself.

Gille-sama is probably also coming up with various plans. When I think like that, then I can think of it as a competition.

However, even if she thought that way, time was limited. Every day for Cordelia was hectic. She had to prepare for her own classes, check the greenhouse, check on trades, listen to Ronnie's progress on the oblaat, and visit the Witch to hear her lectures and borrow books from her.

When she thought that she was a little sleepy, Emina giggled.

"Ojou-sama, you also stayed up late yesterday, didn't you?"

"... Did you see the light?"

"No, you have bags under your eyes."

Cordelia instinctively grabbed the mirror that was close to her when Emina pointed that out. She certainly had a faint shadow under her eyes.

"Why don't you take a nap? It's hard to come up with an idea if you're too enthusiastic."

Cordelia was a bit hesitant over Emina's proposal, but she decided to accept it. She wasn't sleepy enough to accidentally fall asleep, but it was serious enough for her to get eye bags. They stood out too much because her skin was white. She could conceal it with make-up, but she wanted to leave that as a last resort. Make-up was a weapon, not something to adjust your physical condition.

(... I shouldn't be thinking this.)

When her thoughts strayed, Emina once again said, "Ojou-sama, please rest."

"Okay. I'll do that after I progress a little more."

However, Emina must not have trusted my 'a little more'.

Before long, Emina came back with hot chamomile milk-tea. Cordelia's drowsiness increased after she drank her sweet and warm drink.

(I have to give up and take a break.)

It didn't take long for her to fall asleep after she had laid down. However, she came up with a good idea in her dream but forgot about it when she woke up and dropped her shoulders a little in disappointment.

Cordelia made up her mind. *I need to come up with a plan that is acceptable to me so I can have a good rest.*

Act 38: Thoughts, Words and Action

A few days after that, Cordelia went to Oulu Village with Ronnie and the Witch.

There were six students today, and Toto.

Toto always fell asleep quickly, but she remembered things that impressed her. The materials that Cordelia had made for the classes were a bit difficult for Toto to read, but she enjoyed circling words that she liked with a pen.

(Lara's pencil will be of use to Toto as well when she's finished with it, but she said that it'll take a bit longer to complete.)

The prototype that Cordelia had used felt good enough, but Lara's standards were too high, and she wasn't quite satisfied. However, she had to respect Lara's decisions since she had left the task to her. At least it was almost finished.

"Then, we'll continue from the last lesson and continue with the early days of our kingdom. I would also like to touch on the clothing of those days and their meanings. In those days, it was especially popular to engrave scabbards, and the patterns of those times are still being engraved onto the handles of swords as charms. So, I also want to..."

It happened not long after Cordelia had started her class.

A moment after the door slammed open, Mick flew into the room with heavy footsteps.

"Mick-kun, did you also come to listen?"

Cordelia asked, just in case, even though his face told a different story. *I chose my words carefully because he would probably quarrel with me if I asked him what he came here for, but either way, these words don't mean much to him. He's sneering as proof.*

"What benefits will I get from listening to your class?"

Mick said, then he stood by Toto. He reached out his hand and grabbed Toto's class materials.

"Toto, you can't read this well, can you?"

"That's Toto's! Give it back!"

"You don't need it!"

"I do!"

Toto raised her fists at Mick, but it didn't hurt him much because of the difference in their bodies.

"What? Do you want to give me a shoulder massage?"

He agitated Toto more with his arrogant tone.

Cordelia slowly approached them.

"Toto-chan, you can't. Violence isn't good."

Cordelia stopped Toto first, then she turned towards Mick and held out her hand.

“That’s Toto’s. I’ll give you a new copy if you’re going to attend this class. So, give it back to her.”

Cordelia remained as calm as possible as she told that to Mick without any anger in her voice. She couldn’t say that Mick wasn’t in the wrong. He had taken someone else’s belongings. However, she didn’t think that he hadn’t come there with a purpose, since he had gone out of his way to go there from the back room.

However, Mick clicked his tongue in response to Cordelia.

“No way. It’s rubbish, isn’t it? Rubbish. I don’t want it.”

“Then, you don’t need that either, do you? Why do you have it?”

Cordelia said, as she stared at Mick. He looked as if he was holding in his anger. His face gradually got redder, and he screamed.

“You’re annoying!”

“Why?”

“Shut up. Go somewhere else if you just want to play around! Get the hell out of here!”

Mick said as he held the class materials in front of him and vigorously tore the papers. He also threw two pieces of paper into the air, and they fluttered to the ground.

Toto started crying at the same time, as if a dam had been broken.

“Mick-kun. Apologise to Toto.”

“Why do I have to...?”

“I know that you don’t like me, and I don’t mind if you say that my actions are only to satisfy myself. But you can’t put them down as well.”

Cordelia said as she looked at Toto, and then she looked around the class. After that, she looked back at Mick again. *Mick-kun probably can tell the mood in the room.*

“... Tsk. That’s why you’re annoying!”

He opened the door with a loud bang and flew out.

“Mick!”

Immediately after the children’s cries in the classroom, the children in the other room also raised short shouts of surprise. However, the children in the next room shouted a question as soon as they saw Mick dashing off.

“Mick, where are you going~?”

“Sensei, I’ll chase after him too!”

Two children chased after Mick and flew out of the room.

Cordelia had been delayed because she had her eyes glued on the scene, but she immediately ran to the entrance of the classroom where she had collided with the director, who had come because she had heard the commotion. Although they were both surprised, the director smiled and put her hands gently on Cordelia's shoulder.

"You must have been surprised. I'm sorry. It was a bit choppy, but I heard what had happened."

"Hmm..."

"It would put my mind at ease if he stays in the village after dashing out of here, but I'm worried that he will enter the forest, so I'll go after him. Mick goes into the forest sometimes, even if I tell him he can't, and he doesn't come back until he's hungry. It only happens sometimes, so don't worry."

She said as she called out to the Witch, who was outside.

"Green, I'll leave this place to you. I'll be going after him."

"Ok. Be careful."

Is it true that he only enters the forest sometimes?

The Witch responded without being particularly surprised, "Quickly chase after him."

However, Cordelia watched their exchanged and couldn't determine whether it was alright to leave it to the director.

(I may have said too much.)

I hadn't said anything wrong, but is it okay to leave this to others when I was the cause? However, the Witch saw the director off and smiled at Cordelia.

"It's fine, Dilly-chan. It's dangerous if he goes too deep into the forest... but, as the director said, Mick often goes into the forest."

Still, Cordelia couldn't agree.

The Witch, who saw how Cordelia was acting, approached her and quietly whispered in her ear.

"You may be worried, but some children are anxious because of the commotion. And the director understands that child very well. It's okay."

The Witch placed both hands on Cordelia's shoulders and turned her around.

"It's okay, Dilly-chan. Mick knows the forest the best out of all these children. Now, good luck with your class."

Cordelia had a bad feeling for some reason.

She turned her head to look at Ronnie, but he shook his head because he knew what she wanted to say.

Cordelia saw that he was moving his mouth even though he wasn't speaking, 'You can't go because you'll be chasing him into the mountains'.

Ronnie was here as 『Ojou-sama's Escort』, so what he said was reasonable. That was the most important matter to him, and if he were to go against it, then it wouldn't be from Cordelia's orders.

(I hope I'm just worrying for no reason.)

She thought, as she returned to the classroom again.

The children were like, "Did Mick go into the forest again?" and, "He's mischievous, so Sensei always tells him that he can't enter the forest."

"But Mick's been in a bad mood lately."

"He really has. He always does things that he's told not to."

"But I kinda understand why he does those things when he gets told not to."

"Argh, why would you say that...? Don't copy him, Lana and Tina."

The shocked child then urged Cordelia to resume class, "Dilly-chan, it's about time to start." Cordelia closed the door while feeling extremely reluctant to.

Then, Cordelia let them take a break and finished the rest of the class.

She had looked outside during the break, but there were still no signs of the director or Mick. It was quiet out, but that had made Cordelia uneasy instead. However, even though she couldn't calm down, she was able to finish the class without any difficulty, since she had prepared well and because the children were focused on her class.

After she had finished teaching, Cordelia had the children clean the blackboard and quickly left the room.

"Sensei, has Mick returned?"

"Not yet. But they should be back soon."

The Witch answered Cordelia, who had asked that question straight away, while frowning. Cordelia heard the doors open almost at the same time as she listened to the answer. It was the director and two small shadows. However, Mick wasn't here.

"Green, has Mick come back yet?"

"No, not yet."

"I see... I thought we had just missed each other..."

Even though she said that, the director pushed the children's back and reassured them, "Go help with dinner."

"I'm going to look for him again. I still have some other places I want to look... Green, I'm sorry, but could you look after the children for a little while longer?"

“Of course, I don’t mind... but I wonder if Mick is lost in the forest. Should I ask the villagers to help?”

“Yes. I don’t want to make a big deal out of this, but it gets dark straight away when the sun starts to set. I’ll go ask the chief.”

The director said, before leaving to search for him right away.

(Monsters rarely appear in that forest, so there’s hardly any danger...)

But wild animals such as stray dogs may show up, and he wouldn’t be able to see his own feet once it gets dark. If that does happen, then there’s a high likelihood that I would get blamed.

(I can’t say that the forest is safe even if monsters don’t show up.)

From the uproar, it might be the prolongation of 『quite often』. However, I haven’t been able to settle down since daytime, and I’m becoming more restless as the sun sets.

(This might be too much of a leap, but I might be here because of something from my previous life; even though I don’t remember.)

I don’t know why I was born into this world with my memory intact. Still, I might be here because my previous life ended, for some reason.

I can’t leave Mick alone, given that something unexpected might have happened.

“Ronnie, we’re going too.”

Cordelia said, and Ronnie answered briefly.

“It’s the forest.”

“That’s why we’re going. It’s dangerous for children.”

“Dilly, you’re also a kid, and I’m worried that you’ll get lost in an unfamiliar forest... Well, we have no choice; but only if you don’t pass me.”

Ronnie accepted Cordelia’s proposal while scratching his head. He compromised because he would still be doing his job if he didn’t leave her side.

However, it was the Witch who was surprised.

“You’d better stop. The return coach will be here soon. I’ll be staying the night, but your family will get worried if you don’t go home, right, Dilly-chan?”

“I’ll make arrangements for my return. But we have to find Mick as soon as possible.”

It will probably be a serious matter if I go home late without contacting home. Then, I’ll also be causing trouble for the poorhouse.

Cordelia tried to write a message. *How much do I have to pay to get the coachman to deliver this to my house?*

“Ah, Dilly. I’ll write that.”

Ronnie said, as he received the pen from Cordelia and quickly wrote the gist of what was happening.

Cordelia questioned the Witch while waiting for him to finish.

“Sensei, I want to confirm this again. Mick-kun often goes to the forest, doesn’t he?”

“Yes. Monsters don’t show up there, so it’s perfect for exploring. But there are a lot of places with bad footing, so Mick gets scolded a lot for going there. But that’s why he knows the forest just as much as the director... no, he knows the forest better than anyone.”

Then, he won’t be lost. It’s hard for me to think that he got lost since it was already time for him to go home and it’s getting darker outside.

“The coach is nearly here.”

“Okay. Let’s go.”

Cordelia left the poorhouse with Ronnie, who had skilfully folded the letter.

The Witch stopped them, “Wait.”

“If you have to go... if you’re going, then I won’t stop you. There’s a gap in the hedge at the entrance of the village, please go to the forest through there. But... don’t overdo it. It will be a disaster if you two get lost.”

“Yes, I promise. Then, I’ll be off.”

Cordelia responded with a grin.

Cordelia and Ronnie headed to the coach when they left the poorhouse.

“We’re departing now~.”

Ronnie slowly replied to that laid-back voice.

“I want to confirm this, but this coach is ending at the royal capital today?”

“Yeah, it’s alcohol time once this trip finishes. Do you want to drink too, bro?”

“No... I want to ask you a favour. Could you deliver this letter to someone named Hans at this address and say it’s from Ronnie? And, it might not be much, but please use this to buy snacks with your drinks.”

“Is that... alright?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, looks like I’ll get to drink good alcohol tonight. So, are you guys not boarding?”

“No. Not this time.”

“Then, I’m off. Bye.”

The carriage left after that exchange. Cordelia and Ronnie turned away from the carriage while listening to the sounds of the wheel turning and headed towards the forest.



They immediately found the gap in the hedge that Mick had probably entered the forest from.

Ronnie asked Cordelia as soon as they entered the forest.

“Ojou-sama, how are you going to find a kid who someone familiar with this forest couldn’t?”

“I might find something strange because I’ve never been here before.”

“That’s a cliché used by amateurs, isn’t it?”

“You’re very pessimistic. Or rather, it’s rare for you not to be confident.”

She looked at Ronnie, who had spoken in monotone, and saw that he had waved his hand lightly to create light. That light acted as a lamp.

(... Ronnie really is a good magician. He doesn’t even need tools.)

Cordelia also had a magic tool that resembled a small flashlight for when she went out, but the light Ronnie had created was much brighter. However, magic like that was trivial to Ronnie. He slowly let out a long sigh.

“My brother, who is two years older than me, would often run out of the house when he was Mick’s age. I also helped look for him. But we never found him until he came out... but he knew everything we did. That’s why I’m sure that that kid found a good place to hide and is watching us.”

“I would feel relieved if he is watching us. Because then he won’t be hurt.”

“Well, this is a forest. Let’s quickly find him and get out of here.”

The forest was thicker than she thought it would be. They could occasionally hear the sounds of insects too. There was a forked road along the way, but one side had a spider web in a relatively low position, so they didn’t hesitate to choose their path.

(There’s a lot of places for a child to hide.)

She looked around the vicinity so that she wouldn’t overlook small areas and let out a loud voice which she usually wouldn’t use.

“Mick-kuun. Mick-kuun!”

However, not even her voice echoed back at them.

Ronnie approached and parted the grass every time he found a thicket, but he couldn’t find any human traces. *Should I be pleased that there aren’t any traces of Mick going off the main road, or should I be worried that we can’t find any traces of him?*

“Let’s go a little further.”

“... Okay.”

I want to quickly get some kind of response ——— she wished, as she continued to carefully observe her surroundings while they progressed further. Ronnie muttered while they were searching for Mick.

“At any rate, I was surprised when you said you were going to teach, Ojou-sama. However, it’s even more surprising that Master gave you permission to.”

Cordelia tilted her head when Ronnie suddenly brought up the topic. *Why not?* But she wanted to answer him, since he was helping her.

“Is it that strange?”

“Definitely. However, I’m sure normal noble ladies wouldn’t be able to put up with it if Mick lunged at them. Ah, I don’t think you’re normal.”

“... Say, Ronnie. Why do you think Mick-kun hates me?”

Like the director had said, one of the reasons is because he wasn’t good with interacting with people. But I don’t think that’s all. Mick-kun doesn’t talk to Vernoux-sama or Gille-sama, and he doesn’t attack them at all. Even though there was the thing with the muffin, the difference in our treatments is too different.

“Why do you think he hates you, Ojou-sama?”

“... I can only imagine that he thinks of me as unpleasant.”

I understand that he might think of this as a rich person’s sympathy and pastime, since he had said ‘If you want to play around’. Of course, I have no intentions of playing around, but I already know that those thoughts don’t matter.

(At the time of the fake Flora Silk incident, there was a disparity in wealth since he thought that his sister’s illness could be cured with money.)

Ted’s incident was different from the truth, but this could be similar to what had happened to him. If Mick-kun lost his parents to illness... then this violent reaction against Cordelia might be stronger.

But, in the end, she couldn’t know what he was thinking just from hypothesising about it.

But Ronnie chuckled when he heard Cordelia’s response.

“... Why are you laughing?”

“No, well, isn’t it just that? Hating and unpleasantness aren’t that much different.”

“...”

Now that he mentions it, it certainly does seem like just another way to phrase it.

In any case, the answer which she wanted to hear from Ronnie wasn’t that, so she gave a long sigh. Ronnie shrugged.

“Ojou-sama, you’re becoming very impatient.”

“... Yeah. A lot of things come to mind, but they don’t come together.”

“Well, it’s charming from my point of view.”

“Charming?”

Where? Cordelia got a little irritated as she looked at Ronnie. In contrast, he looked a little happy.

“Because you don’t give up easily, do you? It’s charming to see who will persist between you and him. However, the current situation was beyond my expectations. Let’s look over there next.”

Ronnie stiffened his expression as he said that and pointed to the right side of a forked road. The road on the left was filled with decaying trees and was hard to pass through.

“... Ronnie, you have quite bad taste.”

“Huh? For choosing roads? It’s normal, isn’t it?”

“Not that. When you said, it was fun to see who will persist... Wait. Say, can’t someone go through here?”

Cordelia stopped, bent over and looked at the tunnel which was made from shrubs. The shrubs went quite deep, and even Ronnie couldn’t guess where the exit was.

“The entrance is a bit small, but it seems a bit easier to move once inside, since it looks like it gets wider.”

“You’re right... But that’s only if it was a kid. It would be quite tough for someone of my physique to crawl through there.”

“Then, shall I go? I’ll come back right away if he’s not there.”

“No, it’ll also be tough for you to crawl through it.”

“It’s more important for us to find out if Mick-kun went in here than to worry about my condition.”

I couldn’t do this in a dress, but it should be okay if my current clothes get damaged or dirty. It’ll be okay if I mend them.

But in contrast to Cordelia’s enthusiasm, Ronnie sighed.

“Well, it would indeed be hard for the director to pass through here with a skirt, and she probably wouldn’t search here. I wonder if I can pass through... if I take off my robe and crawl.”

Ronnie took off his robe, hung it on a tree and lightly turned his arms. Afterwards, he took a breath in determination and put his knees to the ground. He wasn’t going to let her go by herself, even if he was close by.

“Then, I’ll go first... ouch, it hurts! A twig poked me. Wah, it might be stuck on my clothes. Oh, it would be very unpleasant if you get a wound on your face, so be careful. There are also twigs on the ground, so don’t hurt your hands.”

“Thanks. I’m fine for now.”

She could guess that Ronnie was occasionally breaking branches with his magic from the sounds she heard and the speed they were moving at. Unlike Ronnie, who was crawling, Cordelia was on all fours.

(I can pass through here like this, so it's definitely easier for Mick-kun to go through here.)

She thought, as they proceeded, and Ronnie eventually spoke in liberation.

"Yay, I can see the end."

They crawled out of the tunnel and Ronnie stretched his back.

"Alright, I can walk now! But it's already dark here. Do you think he's here?"

"I think it would be great if we found him."

"But, if he really is here, then it would be pointless to search for him elsewhere. I think we were over there. You can't see this place well from there."

Ronnie looked over at the direction beyond the shrubs, just like the ones they had seen before they had entered the tunnel. But the robe that Ronnie had hung up was nowhere to be seen.

Cordelia slowly observed the area.

There was relatively tall grass growing around there, and there were brightly coloured flowers blooming everywhere. She also saw some plants with warm coloured leaves growing in the middle. *This place would probably look more colourful and beautiful in the daytime.*

(The plants before and after the tunnel are quite different.)

Sure, we spent some time in the tunnel, but I never dreamt that the plants would change this much. It might not be that weird for different plants to grow at this distance.

Is this also the influence of magic on the land...? She thought up until there, and a tree, which looked easy to climb, caught her eye.

"That tree looks like it's been broken. And it looks fresh."

"You see quite well in the dark."

"I can't see it clearly. But the tree's magic looks broken."

"Let's get a little closer."

Cordelia approached the tree with Ronnie. They saw a slightly thick branch on the ground. That was proof that the branch had been broken with unreasonable force.

"Somehow, it feels like a kid fell and broke the branch."

"It does. And if he did fall from that height, then he may be hurt."

"There's a spring over there. I can feel strong water magic."

"Let's go look."

We have to find him quickly if he is injured... Cordelia thought, as she jogged towards the spring.

However, there was no one at the spring. However, there was a wet child-sized top drying beside the spring, on a rock.

“He’s a bit further back.”

Cordelia took a deep breath when Ronnie tried to go further.

“Mick-kuun! You’re here, aren’t you?!”

She screamed with all her might, and her voice echoed back.

Her voice was so loud that it made Ronnie freeze, and the birds, who were resting nearby, fluttered away.

Cordelia, however, didn’t miss the noise of the thicket swaying in front of her. She quickly ran into the depths of the thicket.

Mick, who was half-naked, was sitting there.

“W-why are you here?!”

“I should ask you that. Why are you here, Mick-kun? And why are you dressed like that? You could catch a cold or get bitten by insects.”

“St-stay away from me!”

Mick moved back while still sitting to distance himself from Cordelia, but he soon hit the thicket and couldn’t distance himself any further.

“Why did you come here?”

“To look for you. It’s dangerous at night even if you’re familiar with the forest.”

“It’s none of your business. Why you...?”

“You are certainly none of my business, but everyone in the poorhouse and the village are worried about you. Let’s quickly go back.”

“...”

Mick closed his mouth. He thought of something when she’d said, everyone. Cordelia leaned over to his side. She looked over his whole body, and her eyes stopped on his left leg.

“You’re hurt after all. You have to get this treated as soon as possible...”

She couldn’t see any dirt in his wound, so he must have washed it in the spring. However, he had a bruise and traces of blood on him. The trails showed that he had grazed a large area even though he may have washed it off.

(His bone might be cracked)

I have to get him back quickly or else... She thought, as she tried to call Ronnie, but then she was suddenly shocked.

“I don’t want to go back with you!”

“Eh?!”

Cordelia was suddenly pushed back, and she fell on her backside. Despite that, she got up as soon as she saw that Mick was about to run away and chased after him. Luckily or unluckily, Mick's leg was wounded, so he was slow.

She quickly caught up to him and grabbed his arm. However, Mick didn't obediently let her catch him.

"Let go!"

"Ah!"

Mick's swing was stronger than she had thought it would be, and she let him go. Her balance also broke at the same time. The ground and Mick's feet were reflected in her eyes.

But that was when she realised.

Mick's injured left leg was floating in the air, and the ground came to an end.

This was a cliff.

(He's going to fall...!)

The moment she understood this, Cordelia stepped forward with all her might and extended her right hand towards Mick's arm. *I managed to grab his wrist...* She put her hand into her left pocket as she thought that.

Mick finally realised that his left foot was no longer on the ground. He gulped and widened his eyes. To her surprise, Mick didn't brush off her hand, or he didn't plant himself on the ground with his right foot.

Mick's weight wasn't light enough for Cordelia to pull. Shortly after, she was dragged along by Mick and also floated in the air.

She heard him scream, but she had no time for him.

She quickly pulled her hand out from her left pocket and channelled her magic into the seed she had taken out.



(Make it in time...!)

That was her only wish as she threw the seed directly below them.

Cordelia and Mick were diving onto a thick grass cushion. The unripe smell of the leaves reached her nose.

“... I made it on time.”

I had a second and little more to spare. I felt a strong wind resistance, as we were falling, so Ronnie may have used some kind of magic to help us. So, I had about two seconds? She thought as she looked up at the cliff from where they'd fallen. It looked to be the same height as falling from a second floor.

“Ojou-sama!”

“I’m fine, Ronnie! I’m not hurt.”

I can’t actually check, so I’m probably not.

She added in her mind as she narrowed her eyes. Ronnie had a light, so his surroundings were bright, but she could only see his pitch-black silhouette because he was backlit. However, she could guess his complexion by the tone of his voice.

“I’m angry too! Wait there for me and don’t move. I’ll go down when I’m ready!”

He sounded worried instead of angry. Ronnie looked at the cliff and pulled his face back.

(When he’s ready? What does he need to get ready?)

I wonder if we should do something here as well, while we wait... She thought, but her body felt heavy, so she didn’t ask. She laid down on the grass, with bad manners, and thought, *is this sluggishness the result of me channelling all my magic?*

“Mick-kun, are you hurt anywhere else besides your leg?”

“Ah, no. Are you ok?”

“I’m not hurt.”

It was troublesome to move even a finger, even though she could speak. But she didn’t feel any pain from being injured. It wasn’t impossible for her to move her body, just because it was troublesome, but she was exhausted from feeling relieved and didn’t feel like moving at all.

(... But I can’t let Mick-kun get anxious because of the dark.)

Cordelia thought, as she took out her flashlight magic tool. It was small, so she could light it somehow, even though her magic had almost been exhausted.

“Your hair looks horrible. It’s stuck.”

“I see.”

Mick reported the situation to her when she lit the flashlight. She couldn't see it herself, but she was somewhat aware that he was right. *But it would be nice if I don't have to cut it short*, she thought, but still didn't move.

Mick sighed and bend down next to Cordelia's head. Then, she heard the sound of leaves rustling.

"Oh my, are you removing them for me?"

"..."

"Thanks."

"..."

Mick didn't say anything, but that was probably the answer. She moved her heavy neck a little and looked at him.

"Mick-kun, you said you weren't injured anywhere else, but you have a wound on your body. Did you get stabbed by a twig? Or were you cut?"

He may have been unharmed had he been dressed, but there is a small injury on his body.

"It won't go into this wound."

"Yes, but you have to disinfect it when you get back. And you have to get your left leg examined."

"..."

His silence this time was accompanied by a disgusted expression.

Cordelia resisted the urge to spurt out and turned her head back, so she was facing upwards. She slowly closed her eyes as she looked up at the starry night sky...

"Don't close your eyes!"

She opened her eyes when she heard Mick's loud voice.

"Huh?"

"I don't like it. You made me remember something unpleasant because you're pale."

Is he talking about the colour of my skin? It may look that way from the light, but Mick also looks pale to me. However, she thought a little on the word 『unpleasant』 and was able to come to an educated guess on what that was referring to. So, she didn't close her eyes.

"... Why did you jump out?"

Mick's small voice reached Cordelia's ears between the sounds of the insects and the sound of leaves rustling.

"Why...? It would be weird to watch someone fall. So, I jumped out, and it would have been fine if I could pull you back."

"There's no reason for you to save me!"

“Is it not enough that I just wanted to save you?”

Cordelia muttered as she looked up at the sky and she heard him suck his breath in. Cordelia continued.

“You don’t have to worry. I don’t plan on dying. And Mick-kun, you may hate me, but I don’t know you well enough to hate you.”

“I don’t get what you mean.”

“Then, shall we talk until you understand?”

“... You’re definitely an oddball.”

“I don’t think I am, but my friend do tell me I’m weird sometimes.”

“I’m not your friend!”

“Oh my, that’s too bad.”

Cordelia slowly moved her neck as she laughed at Mick’s sudden flustered tone. There weren’t any more sounds of the leaves rustling. But Mick, who was next to Cordelia, sat down and turned away. But he didn’t look like he was going to run off.

“What’s wrong?”

“... Are you a magician?”

“It’s not that big of a deal, but I can use a little bit of magic.”

“... I don’t mind listening to stories about magic.”

“Puf.”

“What!?”

“Nothing.”

I can think of many things, but Mick will get angry no matter what I say... No, he might already be mad. However, he probably won’t run away anymore.

“Oh yes, I said a little too much during class. I’m sorry.”

“... You don’t have to apologise.”

“Well, then... Do you need to apologise to Toto-chan?”

“I know!”

Cordelia was relieved to see that Mick didn’t refuse, even though he had been a little rude. She was relieved that Mick knew that and that he had told her that she hadn’t been wrong.

Then, they heard the sound of the ground being disturbed while they were talking. Cordelia slowly turned her head towards the sound and Ronnie was standing there while pressing his temple.

“Jeez, I’m glad you’re having fun, but I wish you would understand how I feel.”

“I’ve caused you trouble, haven’t I? Thanks.”

Ronnie used a nearby vine and made an impromptu rope with it. He had tied the vine to a tree on the cliff. The vine was thick and braided, and she could strongly feel Ronnie’s magic from the vines. He had used his magic to make the vines stronger.

“Uh... Mick, can you climb up the cliff while holding this? You can grab onto my back if your leg is hurt and you can’t climb.”

Ronnie said, as he leaned down. But Mick shook his head and looked at Cordelia.

“I can do that... but she’s...”

“Oh, it’s fine. Don’t worry. Nothing horrible will happen to you if you leave us and go home.”

“Then, I’ll climb.”

Mick grabbed the rope and slowly climbed up the cliff. Cordelia watched in suspense as she wondered whether his leg hurt.

Ronnie muttered when Mick got half-way up the cliff.

“I’m a little angry.”

“I’m sorry, I know. But I didn’t have any time to tell you.”

“I guessed as much... Well, get up for now and climb onto my back. Please bear with the sweat smell.”

Cordelia somehow got up slowly when Ronnie told her that. But she couldn’t get on his back right away. It wasn’t because she was hesitant to ride on someone’s back, but she just didn’t have any energy to do so.

Ronnie seemed to have understood that by the way she was acting and didn’t pamper her.

“Please do your best to get on. It’s impossible for me to carry you in a princess hold.”

“...”

Of course, it’s impossible, she thought as she adjusted her breathing and slowly got onto Ronnie’s back. Ronnie held the rope with both hands, so he couldn’t support her. Therefore, she clung to him, and Ronnie’s face turned pale.

“Gah, you’re strangling me! Ojou-sama, put your hands somewhere else!”

Cordelia felt bad for Ronnie, who looked to be in a lot of pain, but she was desperate. She didn’t know how to make it better. Therefore, Ronnie eventually created a gentle breeze with his magic and supported Cordelia while climbing up the cliff.

On the cliff, Mick was tense, as he waited for the two to climb up.

Cordelia looked at Mick’s leg. She could see it better than before, thanks to Ronnie’s light, and it looked painful.

“Ronnie, could you carry Mick-kun?”

“Well, I can. But then, how are you planning to walk Ojo... ah, sorry, Dilly?”

“With willpower?”

Of course, that reason wasn't enough for him to agree. Ronnie looked at her in amazement, but she couldn't back down now that she'd seen Mick's injury. So, she made up her mind and got down to stand, but her legs were trembling.

“It doesn't seem like you can walk.”

It was a bluff, but it wasn't impossible. Ronnie sighed for the millionth time today when he looked at Cordelia.

“... Just for today.”

Ronnie muttered a chant and lifted Cordelia with his right hand and Mick with his left. At the same time, Cordelia felt wind pushing her up. *I don't think Ronnie is that strong. So, he probably used the same wind magic as the one I felt earlier.*



“Thanks, Ronnie.”

“Yeah, yeah. But, I’m taking the day off tomorrow. My muscles seem like they’ll ache.”

Then, he collected Mick’s top, which had been left on the side of the spring, and went back down the road they had come here through. Ronnie questioned Mick when they were close to the tunnel entrance.

“Say, did you come through here, Mick?”

It also sounded as if he was worried about how to pass through the tunnel. *He certainly couldn’t bend over while still holding onto us.*

But Mick answered quickly.

“I came here through there. I came through the grass over there.”

Mick pointed to what looked like a dead-end to Cordelia. Ronnie parted the grass with his feet, and another wall of grass appeared before them. It happened several times and was actually somewhere you could walk through.

“... I’m surprised you went through here.”

“Am I amazing?”

“Yeah, you’re an evil brat. However, I’m glad that we can pass through here without going through the tunnel. I was wondering what I should do since I can’t carry you both while crawling through the scrubs. At least it would be easier for me if Dilly walked.”

Ronnie’s words were attacking her for jumping off the cliff rather than her current situation.

Cordelia obediently apologised because she knew that she had worried him.

“I know I did something wrong and I’m sorry.”

“Obviously. Well, I knew that you would have been alright, but it’s bad for my heart.”

Mick’s dissatisfied voice interrupted.

“She didn’t really do anything wrong.”

He had spoken fast, but he also sounded grumpy. Ronnie widened his eyes.

“You’ve become friendly enough to cover for her.”

“I... I’m not covering for her!”

“No well... It doesn’t matter to me.”

Ronnie didn’t say anything else because he thought it was better to not question Mick. However, he looked like he was having fun, even though he said it didn’t matter. But Mick didn’t realise that because he was glaring at the ground.

The road that Mick had taken was a rather steep road with a rock that they had to climb up, but the roots of the tree made a stairway. Ronnie said in amazement, every time they came across an obstacle, “I’m surprised you went through here,” and Mick looked proud.



They finally got out of the forest when Ronnie's breathing got rougher. They arrived at the back of a hut where farm equipment was kept, near the poorhouse. Part of the fence was broken.

"... Did you go into the forest through here?"

"Yeah. I can climb over it if the fence isn't broken, but it makes you want to go if it's broken, right?"

"There's a fence there so that you don't go through, so you can't."

Cordelia retorted the proud Mick and the three visited the chief's house, which was located in front of the poorhouse, first. The director had said that she was going there before Cordelia and Ronnie went into the forest, so that was probably their base for their search for Mick.

The chief's house looked long and was built a little larger than the other houses. The chief was extremely surprised by their sudden appearance.

"This... I'm sorry guests. Mick, you apologise too."

"I already did."

"Chief, Mick injured his leg. Can you take care of him?"

Cordelia didn't remember Mick apologising, but Mick, who had turned away, needed treatment first. However, the action which the chief took when he'd heard that was to hit Mick's head with his fist.

"That's why I always told you that! You're too naughty!"

"Ouch!"

"Guests, I'm sorry, but I'm going to take Mick back to the poorhouse and get him treatment. I also have to tell the villagers that we've found him. Could you wait here?"

The chief said as he pulled Mick's arm and put him on his back. Mick was still holding a hand to his head, but he closed the door when the mayor went outside and looked back at Cordelia and Ronnie.

"... Thanks."

The word that he had spoken while looking sulky and embarrassed seemed to have vanished, but Cordelia had heard it clearly.

The chief returned shortly after.

"The Witch is treating him. It seems like his bones are fine."

"Were the children at the poorhouse worried?"

“No, none of them were. They were all saying, 『Mick wouldn’t get lost in the forest, he probably just overslept』 . So, Mick also acted as if he had.”

“I see.”

“Well, for the time being, you could say that Mick overslept.”

The chief joked a little, but he immediately returned to his calm manner.

“Thanks, guests. I was surprised to see that Mick warmed up to you two. He was abandoned by his dad after his mum passed away. So he’s timid about uncertain connections because of those circumstances... Did you already know about that?”

Cordelia remembered what the director had said as she listened to the chief.

『He’s keeping his distance because he’s a bit sensitive to separation. He’s afraid of suddenly not being able to see someone again, so he keeps people away.』

If that’s because he had been abandoned, then it’s difficult for me to put my thoughts into words. On the other hand, I also feel like our connection isn’t uncertain.

“Of course, we’re already friends.”

“I see. That’s promising. Anyway, do you like tea, Ojou-san?”

“Yes.”

“Then, I’ll go make some. Of course, I’ll make some for you Onii-san too.”

Cordelia watched as the chief laughed and withdrew to the back before slowly approaching the window. Her legs still felt paralysed, but she felt a little better.

She looked at her reflection through the glass. She had a few scratches, but they had already stopped bleeding. Luckily, she could cover them up with her hair, so it wasn’t a problem.

Now, all we have to do is go back to the royal capital... She remembered about the Witch when she thought that.

“Say, Ronnie. Can you go ask Sensei if she wants to come back to the royal capital with us? I think we can send her back.”

“I’ll go ask her.”

Ronnie nodded to Cordelia and was about to go to the poorhouse, but he turned back and looked at her.

“Ojou-sama, you can’t leave here.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t move.”

“It would be nice if you were someone who would make me feel relieved.”

Ronnie said. He probably thought that nothing else would happen to worry him. He reminded her again before walking to where the Witch was at a quick pace.

“Oh? Did your Onii-san go outside?”

“Yes.”

“I hope he gets back before it gets cold.”

The chief came back with tea not long after Ronnie had left. The tea that he had prepared was very warm. She stared outside while drinking her tea as she waited for Ronnie to return. *Today will end once the carriage comes to pick us up.* She relaxed more once she thought that.

Therefore, she couldn't imagine that she would feel nervous again in the next second.

“Excuse me for visiting you at night.”

Cordelia understood straight away that this voice was directed at her.

However, she also thought, *no way*. There weren't many people who had a low voice that she was used to hearing.

“Don't tell me...?”

There's no way I misheard it. But it was hard to believe it when he's here so suddenly.

But she couldn't think of it as a mistake when she saw him.

“O-otou-sama...”

She had asked someone from home to pick her up, but she couldn't have imagined that Elvis, the Earl, would come in person.



Act 39: A Moment's Rest

Cordelia couldn't hide that she was shaken when someone whom she hadn't expected to appear showed up.

(I'm sure that Ronnie had asked Hans to arrange for our pick-up.)

It's impossible for Hans to make his master, Otou-sama, go to Oulu Village. In other words, he was here by his own choice.

"Oh, are you Dilly-chan's Otou-san? You two are alike."

In contrast to Cordelia who had frozen from surprise, the chief laughed while feeling surprised. Of course, it didn't look like he knew that Elvis was an Earl.

And that was also conveyed to Elvis.

"... Thank you for taking care of my daughter."

Elvis smoothly informed the chief.

The expression that he had used was really something a 'polite father who came to pick up his daughter' would say. The chief laughed heartily and replied to Elvis.

"It's fine. I thought that Dilly-chan was a polite girl, but Otou-san is also very dignified."

The chief doesn't realise that Otou-sama is a noble after all.

(... I'm shaking like a mess, even though Otou-sama is on board with this.)

Cordelia thought, as she desperately pretended to act normal. Still, it seemed like the violent sounds of her heart pounding could be heard.

"I'm surprised you knew that she would be here. Did you ask someone?"

"No, I was confident that I would know where she was if I asked the chief."

"Well, that's true. Ah, Otou-san, would you like a cup of tea?"

"We'll be leaving soon, so you don't have trouble yourself."

Elvis asked Cordelia after he had turned down the chief's offer.

"Where's Ronnie?"

"He went to the poorhouse to ask something. He'll be right back."

"I see. We'll leave as soon as he's back."

"Yes."

The conversation stopped.

(Ronnie, hurry back...!)

She was the one who used Ronnie as a messenger, but the situation was uncomfortable. It wasn't the worst situation, since Elvis had hidden the fact that he was an Earl, but that didn't change the fact that she wanted to run away.

(But that's not all... I didn't mean to bother Otou-sama when he's tired...!)

At least, we have to get back to the royal capital as quickly as possible.

She didn't know if her wish had come true or not, but Ronnie came back with the Witch.

"Dilly, Witch-sensei said she's going to stay here for the night, but she wanted to see you off...
Woah!?"

Cordelia wanted to retort to Ronnie's hysterical voice with, "You didn't need to make a strange voice just because you saw Otou-sama," but she also completely understood his surprise. She also thought that Ronnie was doing his best to hold his ground since he hadn't said 『Master』.

"Ronnie-san, what's wrong?"

The Witch appeared from behind Ronnie. She looked around the room, opened her eyes wide and moved her mouth slightly.

(... Huh?)

No sounds came out of the Witch's mouth.

But, if I'm not mistaken, then Sensei is saying something I never expected she would say.

Elvis, on the other hand, didn't seem to pay any attention to the Witch.

"We're leaving. Ronnie, you're driving the carriage."

"Yes, at once!"

Ronnie quickly flew outside after he heard Elvis. Cordelia looked in his direction because she had been surprised by the sound, but she immediately calmed down and turned back to the Witch. But the Witch had already closed her mouth.

(I wonder what happened...)

Cordelia became restless because of the Witch, but she couldn't take things easy.

"Then, excuse us."

Cordelia couldn't be delayed after Elvis had said that and left, so she quickly curtsied.

"I'll be going home now. I'll visit another time."

Cordelia's voice wasn't loud as she spoke to the Witch. However, the Witch's shoulders shook as if she had just heard a sudden sound.

"Sensei?"

"Nothing, I'm sorry. Thanks."

“Mm... Sensei, do you, by any chance, know Otou-sama?”

Cordelia saw that the Witch was restless, prepared herself and asked her about it.

It looked as if the Witch had said her father’s name before.

But she couldn’t come up with any connection between the Witch and Elvis. Elvis’s attitude wasn’t one he used towards friends, and the Witch wasn’t someone who would call an Earl by his name. But, judging from the Witch’s reaction, it was hard to imagine that they didn’t know each other at all.

However, the Witch only shook her head at Cordelia’s question.

“Next time... ok?”

Cordelia couldn’t tell if she meant that she would tell her next time or if they will meet again. However, she didn’t have time to ask the Witch any more questions.

“... See you, Sensei. I’ll come over again.”

“Yes, I’ll be waiting.”

Cordelia left the chief’s house and soon found the carriage which was parked at the village entrance. Elvis had already boarded.

Ronnie, who had been waiting at the carriage door, saw Cordelia and beckoned her, so she jogged to the carriage and got in.

The carriage left soon after.

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The aura inside the carriage was heavy.

Elvis had his arms folded and eyes closed, and his aura was solemn. It was hard for Cordelia to talk to him like that, but she couldn’t remain silent either. She tightly grasped her knees with her hands and desperately thought about how to break the ice.

(But, but I really hadn’t expected... that Otou-sama would come to pick me up.)

The words that he had used on the chief was also utterly different from the ones he would typically use. Even he might use honorifics for work, but he was friendly... instead, he sounded like a 『normal Otou-san』. It was strange to actually hear him use words like that.

But it worries me more that he had directly come to get me. I did tell him that I would be going to the village, and I did inform home that I would be home late. I think I should reflect on this, but did he come to the village because I had sent a message home saying I would be late? Questions swirled within her.

But it was Elvis who had broken the silence as Cordelia thought.

“... It looks like you’ve used up most of your magic. What did you do?”

Elvis’s voice was lower than usual. Cordelia nearly put up her guard on reflex, but Elvis wasn’t angry. She felt that he was closer to being emotionless. Cordelia thought his attitude was odd as she regained a little bit of composure.

“One of the village children got lost, so I went out to look for him.”

I am hiding something, but I hadn’t lied. Otou-sama is probably not convinced with this short explanation. I hadn’t explained what I had done, and I hadn’t informed him why my magic had ran out.

However, Cordelia only received a single reply.

“I see.”

It was silent again.

(That’s all...?)

I’m thankful, but this isn’t like him at all.

Him coming to the village, the words he had spoken at the chief’s house, and his reaction right now... I feel uncomfortable, even though he spoils me. Sensei was also acting strange. I can’t help but feel jittery.

Should I ask Otou-sama now, after all?

If he tells me that he doesn’t know her, then I might have just imagined them acting strange... She thought as she stared at Elvis.

“Otou-sama, do you know the woman who you met in the village? She’s the sensei who I told you about before.”

“Why do you think I know her?”

“No particular reason. I’m sorry if I’m mistaken.”

She didn’t say that she thought this because the Witch had said Elvis’s name. She wasn’t sure if the Witch had really said Elvis’s name or not, and if they did know each other, then compared to the attitude he had shown the chief, he wouldn’t have ignored her.

Elvis opened his mouth when Cordelia began to think that she was wrong.

“... Ask your teacher if you want to know whether I know her or not.”

“Excuse me?”

“Even if she was the same person I knew, it’s been decades. I don’t know her now.”

Elvis, who had spoken in a monotone, ended the conversation with that.

Cordelia answered briefly, “Yes.”

(... This is really strange. I can’t believe that Otou-sama hadn’t explained clearly.)

He probably wasn't trying to hide their connection since he had said that I could ask her. However, I think it would be fine for him to tell me if this is the case. She had more questions and was dumbfounded when she realised something.

Look what I've done! I forgot to say the most critical thing to Otou-sama before I think about this.

“Otou-sama. Thank you for coming to pick me up.”

Elvis, who had been facing the front until now, turned to look at the darkness outside, and he didn't answer her. However, it wasn't like he hadn't heard her. *Should I say it once more just in case?* A faint voice reached her ears when she thought that, “Hm.” Elvis was still looking outside, but she felt like he was embarrassed or shy and smiled.

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The next day, Cordelia woke up in the afternoon.

She hadn't planned on sleeping for that long, but her body was more tired than she'd thought. Pain similar to muscle pain ached her whole body when she got up. *This must have been what Ronnie was talking about yesterday. He must have experienced this before.* She wasn't in a terrible situation where she couldn't walk, but she winced. As a result, she was forced into a situation where she had to spend the whole day in her room.

The next day, she was able to wake up at her usual time.

She rested in the morning, but Vernoux came in the afternoon, so she entertained him in the greenhouse. Her body still ached, but it was much better than yesterday.

Vernoux tilted his head as he drank his tea.

“Dilly, you're moving a bit strangely today. No, is strange the correct way to phrase it?”

“... Vernoux-sama, why don't you stop saying strange or weird to women?”

“But I'm telling the truth, aren't I?”

I certainly feel uncomfortable, but I can't agree with his words. Can't he phrase it differently? However, Vernoux didn't stop hounding her.

“Honestly, what did you do? Did you do something dangerous?”

“Huh?”

“What do you mean by dangerous?” Cordelia tilted her head, and Vernoux pointed at his face.

“Here. It's mostly hidden by your hair, but you have scrapes on your face.”

Cordelia had scrapes on her face in a place which was hard to see, and she had already received treatment for them, so there weren't any lingering wounds. Therefore, she was surprised by Vernoux's observation power.

“Did you get into a fight?”

“No way. I won’t do something like that.”

“You’re right. But you don’t normally injure your face. Did you fall?”

“... Well, something like that.”

It’s also embarrassing to say that I fell, but it’s much better than stating the real reason. And he’ll probably only laugh if I say I fell. Cordelia resolved herself, but Vernoux had a difficult time to read the expression on his face and was far from laughing.

“Vernoux-sama?”

“I don’t know what you did, but you shouldn’t do anything rash. Women will regret it if they injure their face.”

Cordelia was surprised by his words and blinked several times. From what he had said, she knew that he hadn’t believed her. That in itself wasn’t surprising, but he wasn’t acting like himself.

“Vernoux-sama, are you perhaps sick today?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

He had half glared at her, but she had meant what she said. It was rare for him to act like a gentleman before teasing her. However, she wasn’t planning on spoiling the mood of her friend, so she didn’t answer his question.

“But I’m okay. This kind of wound wouldn’t leave scars, so there’s no need to regret having a scar on my face.”

I can’t deny that it wasn’t dangerous, but I don’t want to think that it would have been better if I hadn’t done it, since Mick could have been seriously hurt.

“... Well, I didn’t think that the stubborn Dilly would just easily agree with me. But keep it in moderation.”

“Thank you for your advice.”

“I’ll give you another piece of advice. You better phrase your words better if you want to tell a lie without being found out.”

“Huh?”

“The strange pause was a dead giveaway, but the usual Dilly would act like nothing had happened and say, 『Nothing happened』, right? If you had said that then I may have only thought, 『Ah, she fell because she was thinking about weird things again』.”

“Vernoux-sama, that’s extremely rude.”

“But it’s not bad to know about it, right?”

“It’s certainly valuable information that makes me want to cry. Thank you very much.”

Vernoux laughed in satisfaction when Cordelia said that.

Honestly, what a good personality my friend has. Cordelia shrugged.

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The morning after, Cordelia's condition mostly returned to normal.

She hadn't recovered completely, but her movements weren't hindered. Vernoux probably wouldn't have called her strange if he had visited a day later.

Cordelia informed Ronnie that she wanted to go visit the Witch in the afternoon. Ronnie was surprised at her recovery, but he went out to deliver her letter to the Witch without any objections.

Cordelia, who had entrusted him with the letter, went to the kitchen to meet the head chef next. She wanted to bring a gift with her since she was visiting the Witch.

"Ojou-sama, is there anything I can help you with?"

The head chef, who was in the kitchen, rushed towards Cordelia before she could even call out to him. The head chef, who had helped her obtain herbs and create dressings with those herbs since she was little, probably thought that she had visited for those reasons. However, she had come here for something else today.

"I want to make muffins. Is it possible for me to get ingredients for them? And, can you lend me the kitchen for a little while?"

"Muffins? You will? If so, then we can make something that would satisfy you..."

The head chef's reaction was natural.

He wouldn't have thought I would have said that since ladies usually don't cook. Sometimes I would cook in the laboratory... for example, the honey lemons, but normal ladies definitely wouldn't cook. I'm able to cook because it's in the laboratory. Only Otou-sama knows about this apart from Ronnie, Lara and Emina. Cordelia smiled.

"Of course, I know I would be able to eat delicious sweets if I ask you chefs to make it. But, I have a recipe from someone who has been taking care of me. She also taught me how to make it. So, I want to make it for her myself as a thank you."

"B-but..."

"It's okay. If you're worried, then you can put it in the oven. That way you wouldn't have to worry about me getting burnt, right?"

"... Okay. Then, I'll help you."

Cordelia was relieved that she had received permission from the head chef even though he was frowning. The head chef might have been wondering who she learnt it from, but her requests have

always been crazy, so he might have concluded that it was too late now. In any case, she was thankful that the head chef was playing it by ear.

“Ojou-sama, may I have the recipe?”

“Yes, of course.”

Cordelia handed the head chef the recipe for cocoa custard muffins. The head chef instructed his chefs and the ingredients were prepared in the short while that it took Cordelia to wash her hands. They had even weighed everything for her.

(... I'm really thankful, but I feel like the most crucial step to baking has already been done.)

The powder used for baking, which was similar to baking powder in her previous world, had already been sieved and mixed. In other words, all Cordelia had to do was the simple process of mixing it.

(They're anxious about my skills.)

The head chef probably didn't want her to embarrass herself, but if she didn't get rid of his concern, then this would happen every time she requested to cook.

(The only way to get rid of his worries is by showing him that he doesn't have anything to worry about... right?)

That's right, this is his way of being thoughtful. I should be able to measure the ingredients myself if I show him that I'm more capable than he thought I was.

Cordelia motivated herself. She confirmed the ingredients once again and picked up an egg, then she heard a gulp behind her.

(I feel like he's saying... she forgot how to break an egg.)

I feel bad for the anxious head chef, but there's nothing to worry about. Cordelia lightly tapped the egg on the edge of the bowl and broke the shell. She didn't drop the egg into the bowl; instead, she separated the whites and the yolk with the shell. Then, a voice of admiration sounded from behind her.

“Ojou-sama, you can break the egg without any shells falling in.”

“... Yes, I can.”

I've already established that ladies in this world don't know how to crack eggs when Sensei admired me last time. However, this might have been considered as a reckless challenge if he thought I couldn't crack an egg, even though I had asked him if I could make sweets. I thought he would admire me for being able to separate the whites from the yolk without failing more than breaking the egg... No, that isn't even difficult in the first place.

However, she was relieved that he got some peace of mind from this. At the same time, she also thought, *that's such an exaggeration for one egg...!* But her muffins would be delayed and turn into a mess if she got distracted by her thoughts. She rearranged her thoughts and quickly progressed.

But then, she noticed that the other chefs were also focused on her and became restless. She wasn't worried about making any big mistakes, since she had already made them once with the Witch, but she felt uncomfortable that they were cheering occasionally, even though she hadn't done anything special.

While thinking, she had finished the custard cream and muffin dough.

Cordelia lightly combined them together and put them into the mould. She then gave the finished product to the chef to put into the oven. She'd thought it would have been fine even if she did that herself, but she found it hard to say that to the head chef, who had been waiting for her as she put the muffin mixture into the mould. And the head chef's eyes seemed to be saying 『I definitely won't let you use the oven』. She thought that she had freed him of his worry to some extent, but it would take time to get rid of it completely.

The muffins were baked nicely after she waited for a bit.

She had made 11 muffins. She gave one to the head chef and brought the rest back to her room.

“I'll take one to try and bring two to Sensei... There's seven left. Give one to Ronnie, Lara and Emina, now there's four. I wonder if Hans will eat it.”

If he will, then that's three left.

“I want to give one to Otou-sama, but I wonder if he'll like it?”

He probably won't find fault in me cooking, even though it's not something a lady would do. He seemed impressed when he tried the honey lemon I made him.

(I don't think he hates sweets if he's okay with honey...)

I've never seen him eat sweets of his own accord. However, he spoils me even if he doesn't like sweets. It might be hard to get him to say it's delicious, but he'll probably eat it in silence. But I don't want to force him to eat it if he doesn't like it.

“...”

As a result of her pondering, she put the muffin into a small box and wrapped it. Then she put a message card at the top. She wrote on the card, 『If you don't mind, please have this as a snack. If you don't want it, then I'll eat it later』. She didn't write that she had made it.

“Alright, I'll leave this to Hans. Now... there's two left.”

Where should the remaining two go? I know that the female magicians like sweets, but two isn't enough. Then the most appropriate people to give these two are... She thought and remembered her friends.

(I'll have exactly none left if I give one to Vernoux-sama and Gille-sama.)

But I wonder if those two can eat something a lady made, even though I used the same recipe as Sensei? Can they eat something made by me when people think that ladies can't even break eggs?

She hadn't told them when she had made muffins at the Witch's last time. She wasn't keeping it a secret, but it never came up in conversation.

She was at a loss as she took a bite of the muffin. *This might sound like I'm singing my own praises, but it tastes the same as the muffins Sensei makes. It has a gentle flavour. I was able to make them according to how I was taught.*

“They won’t think it tastes bad even if they eat it. If they don’t eat it... then that’s that.”

Cordelia finished her muffin then carefully wrapped the two remaining muffins. She also took her favourite tea out from the cupboard. *I'm sure this will go well with the muffin.* But she suddenly realised.

“I can send this to Vernoux-sama, but can I send something that can’t wait to Gille-sama?”

If I sent him a letter, then it would be fine no matter how many days pass before he receives it. But sweets are different. Muffins don't have to be eaten straight away, but I don't know how often Vernoux-sama and Gille-sama meet. If it goes bad by the time they next meet... then Gille-sama would get sick, and I would also be damaged.

After wrapping the muffins, Cordelia picked up stationery and a pen and wrote a letter to Vernoux while hesitating. She simply wrote that she had made some sweets and he should try it if he wants to. She didn’t mention Gille.

(It would be fine Gille-sama is with him, and they eat it together. But Vernoux-sama should be able to eat two muffins even if they don't plan to meet.)

Cordelia put the letter together with the muffins and asked a messenger to send it to the Flantheim House.

Then, Cordelia went with Ronnie to the Witch’s house after she had lunch.

Act 40: The Witch, the Earl, and Reminiscing

Cordelia questioned Ronnie on the way to the Witch's shop as she held a basket which contained the muffin.

"Say, Ronnie, I'd like to talk to Sensei alone today. Could you go outside in the meantime?"

"Okay."

"Eh, is it really okay?"

"I said it's okay... Ojou-sama, you said it, didn't you?"

She had certainly asked so, but she was a little surprised that Ronnie had answered so quickly. She didn't think he would refuse, but she thought he was going to hesitate for a bit. But Ronnie naturally accepted.

"Of course, I'll be waiting outside the shop. If I'm too far away, then I won't be able to make it if something happens and there would be no point in me being an escort."

"Yes, of course."

"Something must be bothering you for you to say that. Then you should quickly resolve it."

Ronnie stretched and crossed his arms behind his neck. He looked as if he was ignorant of tension, as usual. Thanks to that, Cordelia's tension also went away somewhat.

They eventually arrived at the Witch's shop. Cordelia separated from Ronnie for now and entered the shop.

"Welcome, Dilly-chan."

"Hello, Sensei."

The Witch spoke to her as soon as she entered the shop. The Witch put the bottles of medicinal herbs onto the shelf before walking up to Cordelia.

"Thank you for the other day. It was a disaster, but... are you alright, with a lot of things?"

"Yes. I'll be visiting Oulu Village again."

The Witch, who had sounded worried, might have also been worried about Cordelia's physical condition when she said 'a lot of things', but Cordelia didn't mention it. *I'm almost in good condition, and Sensei would just be worried if she found out that I spent time in bed.* Cordelia held out the basket with both hands to deflect the conversation.

"I made the muffins that Sensei taught me today."

She smiled when she held out the basket, and the Witch blinked a few times before relaxing and smiling.

"Oh my, they're lovely. I'll make you a special cup of tea."

"Thank you very much. Actually, I didn't bring tea in anticipation for that."

Cordelia replied a little impishly, and the Witch also joked.

“Mick was very remorseful. He apologised to Toto for ripping her papers, and he copied Lara’s materials to give to Toto.”

“Oh my.”

“Lana didn’t want to give him her copy because she thought he was going to tear it up, but he kept lowering his head to her. She finally lent it to him, and he copied it. But Toto told him that his writing was messy, so he rewrote it over and over again.”

“It would be nice if they could make up.”

“But he said he didn’t want to see you again.”

“Why is that?”

“Apparently, he wants to apologise in a cool way. However, he hasn’t found the way to do that yet, so he doesn’t want you to come for a while.”

“I’m... very troubled by that.”

Cordelia smiled bitterly while feeling relieved that he hadn’t rejected her outright. She didn’t understand what a cool apologise was.

“But the other kids want you to visit, so he’ll have to put up with it.”

“Then, I’ll pretend that I didn’t hear about his cool apology plan.”

“Yes, that would be for the best. Thanks.”

After they smiled wryly at each other, the Witch prepared the tea utensils and urged Cordelia to sit down. The Witch gave Cordelia tea and an empty plate where Cordelia placed the muffin.

They carried the cups to their mouth once everything was settled.

Cordelia, who had moistened her throat with the tea, asked the Witch.

“I have asked you this before... But, Sensei, have you met my father before?”

But, as soon as she’d said that, she regretted that she’d brought up the topic too abruptly. Furthermore, the Witch had prevaricated the last time she had asked that, so she should have taken more caution when broaching the subject.

Luckily, the Witch didn’t seem offended. She slowly asked Cordelia.

“What did your father say?”

“Father didn’t say anything. But please tell me if you don’t want to talk about this. I won’t ask anything else.”

It sounded like she had added that on, but she said it just in case. She was worried about the connection between Elvis and the Witch, but it might not be something she could hear just because she was

curious. But she was really hung up on the fact that they had neither denied nor confirmed their connection.

Cordelia quietly waited for the Witch's answer. The Witch exhaled a short, but long breath before dropping her gaze.

"He just doesn't want to talk about it. But, if the Earl is going to tell you that what I said is a lie, then I want you to hear his truth from him."

"... So, you do know my father, after all."

"I do. Honestly, I've known ever since I first saw you."

The Witch said as she slowly raised her face to look at Cordelia.

"But I don't know much about the current Earl. The person who I will be talking about is not the 『Earl』 but the little rascal 『Elvis』."

"Huh?"

Cordelia doubted her ears for a moment.

Rascal?

Cordelia's thoughts stopped for a moment because of that unexpected word. However, the Witch continued seriously.

"My name is Fulvia. I was born into a Baron House. I worked as a servant in the Pameradia House to help my impoverished family, and I am Elvis's birth mother."

"Huh?"

"This is a story about no one becoming happy. It's a little long, but it's an old story."

The Witch named Fulvia slowly began to talk.

"I was introduced to the Pameradia House at the age of sixteen and started working for them as a servant. Shortly after I started working, I met the former head in the attic where I was cleaning. He went up there to hide and take a nap. I had similar encounters with him several more times after that, and we began to talk... and by the time I'd noticed, I was already attracted to him. Of course, I didn't think my feelings would get through to him because of my status."

"..."

"So, when the previous head told me his feelings, I was delighted and sad at the same time."

"Why is that?"

"The former head lost his parents early, so he had few backers. So, he had a fiancée to protect his position."

Cordelia was stunned by Fulvia's reply. *Oh yeah, the fact that I have a grandmother who is not Obaa-sama... means that the previous head had an official wife. And Obaa-sama had said that no one became happy before.*

Fulvia continued.

"So, I should have ended everything there. But, when I was about to tell him that, his fiancée... the previous lady summoned me. 『I don't care what kind of relationship you and the Earl have, as long as you don't threaten my position』, she'd said. She also told me that she loved someone else."

"..."

"I was surprised. I hadn't expected that she could tell with a glance, when even my colleagues hadn't noticed my secret."

Did she sympathise with Obaa-sama? Or maybe she sympathised with the former head? Or did she say that to reject the former head because she couldn't be with the one she loved?

I don't know what the previous lady's motives were, but I can imagine that those words sounded like a sweet temptation to Obaa-sama when she was young.

"I was grateful for those words and acted on her goodwill. But I should have seen the truth. I noticed it after I became pregnant with Elvis."

"..."

"Even if the lady was the only one who knew our relationship, I couldn't stay in the mansion anymore. I took time off and left the royal capital to go south. It was challenging to get used to an unfamiliar lifestyle, but thanks to that, I didn't have time to feel lonely or reflect. That's probably why I was punished. I got sick when Elvis was four, and I couldn't move. We couldn't buy medicine either because it was too expensive. That was when the previous lady appeared before me again."

"... She knew where you lived."

"I didn't know until then, and I didn't think that the previous lady knew about Elvis. She told me that she would give me medicine if I hand Elvis to her. She said that Elvis would also face hardships if I didn't take medicine and died. Still, I declared that I would heal and refused her. But, Elvis took it upon himself. Apparently, she had told him, 『If you want your mother to be cured then come here』. He didn't want to go, but he didn't want me to die. And... he said that nobles say horrible things and that they were horrible people. So, he'll use whatever methods he had to, to become great, and that he would make life easier for people like me, and that he would come to pick me up."

Fulvia said that all at once and then closed her mouth.

Cordelia stared at Fulvia in silence.

"... So, I couldn't say it. The lady hadn't said anything bad. I had to tell him that this was all my fault... But I didn't dare to tell him the truth."

"But... didn't the servants find it weird when a four-year-old boy suddenly showed up at the mansion?"

“The former lady also gave birth to a child a while after Elvis was born. But... that child was sent straight to her parents’ home to be raised after he was born. No one in the Pameradia House knew what that child looked like. The lady said that they would feel reassured if they met Elvis.”

“Is the former lady’s child perhaps...”

“... The child might not have looked like the former lady or head. But I don’t know.”

If so, then that had nothing to do with Obaa-sama’s illness, and she had planned on welcoming Otou-sama back one day. Of course, this is only my speculation. But I understand what Obaa-sama meant when she said 『a story about no one becoming happy』.

“It was because of that incident that I wanted medicine that even commoners can get. I know that it was me atoning, but by the time I’d noticed, I was studying under a doctor day and night.”

“Have you met Otou-sama since then?”

“I’ve seen him from a distance. He stood out when they made a triumphant return from their campaign, and I thought my heart would stop when I heard that he had gotten seriously injured to protect His Majesty. But he has never asked to meet me, and it would only harm him if we met.”

“Why is that?”

“Being a noble comes with gossip, and gossip can lead to one’s downfall. Of course, the chances of them thinking that I’m his mother are low, but there’s no need for him to worry about unnecessary things.”

Fulvia’s voice never grew louder, but her voice was firmer than before.

“If Elvis wanted to run away from the noble world, then I still want to help him get to the ends of the world. But I shouldn’t meet him now.”

“...”

It sounded to Cordelia as if the Witch was persuading herself.

She stared at the Witch and was convinced about something.

“That’s why.”

“Huh?”

“You said you knew who I was as soon as you’d meet me. You have always been watching Otou-sama, haven’t you Sensei?”

There are only a limited number of places where I appear as Earl Pameradia’s daughter. For her to understand that I was his daughter at first glance means that she has been quietly watching over him, even though she was away from the royal capital for a while.

“... Dilly-chan, don’t you have something to say to me?”

“If you’re asking me if your actions were correct, then it’s difficult for me to answer. But, what’s worse is that I want to call you 『Obaa-sama』, but if I do that in public, then I’ll be causing trouble.”

It certainly isn't something to be praised.

But this doesn't end just by placing blame on someone, and I have no reason to blame her. I don't have any words for someone who regrets this more than anyone else.

“This sounds selfish of me, but if you hadn't chosen the choice you did, Sensei. Then, Otou-sama, and I, even my Onii-samas and Onee-sama wouldn't have been born. I wouldn't have been able to talk with Sensei. I still want to learn a lot of things from you.”

“... Thanks.”

Cordelia surmised that she hadn't said anything that the Witch needed to thank her for, and she wasn't sure if those were words she ought to end a conversation with. She also didn't feel as if Fulvia felt refreshed by talking about it.

(She did talk about this, but nothing has been solved.)

However, something was bugging Cordelia about the story.

(Perhaps... Otou-sama wasn't hiding their past, and he cares about Obaa-sama.)

It's because he cares about her that he didn't mind if I asked Obaa-sama about this. I didn't feel any resentment from him for the guilt that she feels.

(But if this is true... why won't Otou-sama meet Obaa-sama?)

It wasn't easy for Obaa-sama to meet Otou-sama, even if her feelings weren't in the way. But it wasn't hard for him to summon her. Obaa-sama knows a lot about herbs, so he could invite her over as a pharmacist. Even if there are servants who know what she looks like, it'll be fine if they just think of her as a nostalgic face. Nevertheless, what is the reason he won't meet his mother, who he promised to see again?

However, Cordelia, who was thinking as she stared at Fulvia's face, suddenly noticed something that bothered her a lot about her 『Obaa-sama』.

“... Sensei. I would like to ask you something rude.”

“What is it?”

“How old are you...?”

She is older than Otou-sama, but I never imagined that she would be old enough to be his mother.
Fulvia went blank at Cordelia's question and then opened her eyes wide in surprise.

“Dilly-chan, you don't ask a woman's age, now do you?”

She said in a teasing tone.

But I can roughly guess her age, even if she doesn't tell me, since Otou-sama is already in his 50s. The words 『Beautiful Witch』 occupied Cordelia's mind. Obaa-sama must be using some kind of beauty method.

(... Wait, my thoughts strayed.)

Cordelia retorted to herself as she pushed the question out of her mind in response to the Witch's words and vague smile.

Why won't Otou-sama meet Obaa-sama?

(I'm sure Obaa-sama wants to meet him.)

I'll talk to him about this. It might be meddlesome of me. But, I want them to meet if he doesn't have a valid reason.

After all, these were two people who Cordelia loved.

Act 41: Quickly Set the Stage

Cordelia left the shop after talking with Fulvia.

Ronnie was leisurely staring up at the sky.

“Are you finished?”

“Yes, I’m sorry for making you wait.”

“It’s fine. It wasn’t bad to bask in the sun since the weather’s nice. Where will you be going today?”

“Nowhere, we’ll be heading straight home.”

Cordelia, who had returned home while the sun was still high, observed as a carriage moved from the front of the entrance. For a moment, she had thought it was a guest’s carriage, because of the time, but at a closer look, she saw that it was definitely a Pameradia House carriage.

“I wonder if Otou-sama is home.”

“Looks like it. What will you do, Ojou-sama? Will you go to the laboratory or the greenhouse?”

“... I’ll see Otou-sama before going back to my room. Oh yes, I also made some sweets for you. I’ll have it delivered to you later, so eat it with Lara.”

“Oh, thank you very much.”

Cordelia left Ronnie, who was heading towards the magician wing, and went to meet Elvis in his study or his room. *But should I change first, since I just got home? Or should I wait a bit before meeting him?*

Cordelia thought that and headed to her room to change first, but she met Hans, who was pushing a cart with tea, on her way there.

“Welcome home, Ojou-sama.”

“I’m back, Hans. Is that for Otou-sama?”

“Yes. He came home early today.”

The muffin, which Cordelia had entrusted Hans to give to Elvis, was also on the cart.

Hans also noticed her gaze and asked her gently.

“Would you also like to come, Ojou-sama? Master would be pleased if you gave him the muffin yourself.”

“I’ll be glad if he is. I’ll come with you.”

Has Otou-sama already been home for some time, since Hans is bringing him tea? She questioned, as she removed the card which was addressed to Elvis. *I don’t need this if I give it to him directly.* She headed to the study with Hans.

“Master, tea is ready.”

A voice from within the room urged Hans to enter when he knocked on the door.

Cordelia refused once before entering the room before Hans, when he'd urged her to, after he'd opened the door.

"Excuse me, Otou-sama. Welcome back."

"... You went out too, didn't you?"

"I did."

She hadn't expected him to say, 『Welcome home』, but he looked more sullen than usual. She also felt like he was saying 『Behave yourself』, but she didn't dare ask.

I'm going to give him the muffin, but should I say that I made it or not? I hadn't intended to tell him, but I'm lost again now that it's back in my hands.

(... But, Obaa-sama taught me how to make this.)

Cordelia motivated herself a little in her mind.

"Otou-sama. I made sweets today. Would you eat it if you're alright with sweets?"

Cordelia offered the box to Elvis. But he didn't move. Only the sounds of Hans preparing tableware in the back echoed around the room.

(I guess Otou-sama doesn't like sweets after all...)

The moment she began to think that, Elvis finally said, "I'll have it," and the box in her hands disappeared. Hans finished preparing the tea and left the room out of consideration for Cordelia.

Elvis took the muffin out of the box.

"I made this with the recipe the Sensei... Fulvia-sama taught me."

"... So, you heard about it?"

"Yes. But Fulvia-sama said that if you tell me something different, then take that as the correct answer."

Elvis didn't ask any more questions when he heard Cordelia's answer.

Instead, he carried the muffin to his mouth.

"... It tastes similar to what I ate a long time ago on a celebration day. It was a lot simpler, though, and I can't remember the exact taste."

"Do you not plan on meeting her?"

"Both sides won't benefit from our meeting."

It was a very Elvis-like answer; short and disinterested. However, there was a gap which made it sound like something Elvis wouldn't say.

"Fulvia-sama knows a lot about medicinal herbs. I don't think we wouldn't benefit from her since we use plants as weapons."

However, Cordelia, who had said that, couldn't say what she had wanted to and was frustrated. She hadn't actually wanted to talk about what benefits they could gain. She was hesitant to put it into words, but she wanted to frankly ask him if he had a reason for not wanting to meet Fulvia. However, her desire was shown on her face. Elvis sighed briefly.

"Even if I benefit from meeting her, she won't."

"Why do you think that?"

"She doesn't have any good memories of this house, does she?"

His tone wasn't anything special. Instead, it was too typical... and was a very natural way for him to express himself. His expression and complexion hadn't changed at all.

"If she hadn't worked here, then she wouldn't have met the former head, and if I hadn't been born, then she wouldn't have faced hardships. I was really young, but I knew that she was suffering, even without knowing the reasons for why she was suffering."

"..."

"I shouldn't meet her if the cause of her suffering was me. I sought power and progressed because I also thought that it would be great if I could decrease the number of people who live like that. But I don't know if she would benefit from that..."

The words that he had spun indifferently stopped there.

"Are you done here?"

Elvis was saying that he had nothing else to say.

However, Cordelia felt that if she left now, like Elvis wanted, then she wouldn't have the chance to speak about this again. *If I'm going to get to the bottom of this, then now is the time.*

He had only stated objective reasons. *I can only abandon any tact I have... to find out how he really feels.*

"Otouto-sama, you promised Obaa-sama that you would do whatever it takes to be great and that you will improve the lives of the people... Then, once that is fulfilled, you will go to pick her up. You might not be satisfied yet... but will the promise you made Obaa-sama go unfulfilled for the rest of your lives?"

It looked to Cordelia that his eyes had shaken a little when she said 『Obaa-sama』. She continued without slowing down.

"Obaa-sama knew whose daughter I was from the start. She taught me how to make sweets, taught me about medicinal herbs and talked to me... She takes good care of me. And... she's always been worried about you. Didn't you let me get close to her because you care about her?"

"..."

"Otouto-sama, you thought it was alright for me to ask her about the relationship between you two, didn't you? Wasn't that because you wanted to know about her somewhere in your mind?"

“...”

“I know that I’m too forward. But, isn’t it sad that you keep missing each other, even though you two want to meet?”

Elvis didn’t reply, but he hadn’t averted his gaze either.

Cordelia stared him straight in the eye.

Looking into those unresponsive eyes, she began feeling anxious that she’d said something odd. However, she couldn’t withdraw.

(The situation between Otou-sama and Obaa-sama is different from my case, where I’m rejected by Okaa-sama.)

There’s no reason for them not to meet, since they’re both thinking of each other and it’s the opposite of a relationship where one’s existence isn’t even recognised when we pass each other.

“But, there’s no reason to meet her.”

“You don’t need a reason. Just wanting to meet is enough. But if you insist on one... then I’ll provide you with a good reason. Otou-sama, would you like to meet Obaa-sama?”

No matter what he says, if he doesn’t give me a clear reason, then I’ll keep asking him.

She didn’t know if her intentions were conveyed to him, but Elvis spoke as if he was sighing.

“... I don’t mind if she doesn’t refuse.”

He sounded somewhat dissatisfied, but he had certainly accepted.

“Thank you very much, Otou-sama.”

Perhaps, his weakness of being soft on his daughter led to this reply. However, that doesn’t matter. The result is everything.

Cordelia thanked Elvis with a smile and left the room. *The first barrier has probably been broken with this.*

(But... everything will go back to the start if I don’t think of a good reason.)

It wasn’t hard to just invite Obaa-sama to the mansion. For example, I could ask her to the greenhouse to check on the aloe vera that I’d inherited. But that wasn’t enough of an excuse for Otou-sama to meet her.

(Having said that, judging from his attitude... I probably can’t convince him to meet her even if I create a situation where we need her knowledge about medicinal herbs. Which means I need a situation where I can get both Otou-sama and Obaa-sama involved.)

Then, I can only come up with one way.

Cordelia quickly returned to her room and wrote a short letter to Vernoux. 『I have something to talk to you about, so I would like to visit the Flantheim mansion tomorrow』.

“I’ll have this delivered by the end of the day... now, I have to finish the materials.”

Cordelia muttered to herself as she spent the night piling up mountains of materials and documents.

◆◆◆◆◆

Cordelia visited the Flantheim mansion the next day in the afternoon.

“How do you do, Vernoux-sama?”

“It’s rare for you to come here to see me instead of mother. Is this urgent?”

“Yes. I’ve brought the proposal for the mobile library, so I would like you to take a look at them.”

Cordelia promptly forced the bundle of documents, which she’d completed, onto Vernoux.

“... It’s best if you completed this quickly, but still, you finished it pretty fast.”

“Yes, a lot of things have happened, so I did my best.”

“I’ll have a look at it for now. Oh, I ate the muffin yesterday. It was delicious. I gave one to Gille, but I don’t think he’s eaten it yet.”

“Oh my, how come?”

“He said it was a waste for some reason.”

“What does he mean by it’s a waste? What’s a waste? He should eat it as soon as possible.”

Cordelia was exhausted from that unexpected reason.

It’s not that much of a big deal, so I want him to stop raising hurdles before he eats it. Then, it would be more comfortable if he said, “It’s unexpected delicious,” because he hadn’t expected anything from it.

Vernoux’s shoulders shook when he heard Cordelia’s reply.

“Yeah, you’re right. Will you make it again if he asked you to?”

“Yes, of course. As much as he likes. So please tell him to eat it before it goes bad.”

“Alright, I’ll tell him. Well, I don’t think he’ll ask you to make some, but he’ll be happy to hear that,” Vernoux said, as he dropped his eyes onto the documents.

His eyes chased the letters on the document. Cordelia watched him in silence. He continued to look through the documents and finally raised his face at the end.

“Are you planning on consulting with the rental library for the selection criteria for the books?”

“Yes.”

“It may be appropriate, but won’t you consult with someone in the same trade, since you’re dealing with books?”

“It won’t be a problem if the customer base doesn’t overlap. They might resist less if we ask them to help with welfare work. And, for example, I heard that the owner of the Third Street rental library is so eager to education children that he opened up a cram school.”

“You’re well-informed.”

Cordelia responded to Vernoux’s impressed voice with a smile.

“You also listed other places that might be helpful, like the Third Street rental library. And... you’ll get corporate status for the accounting stuff?”

“Yes. I thought it would be best to acquire corporate status as a non-profit organisation. If so, then it would be audited by an agency designated by the kingdom, so we can maintain transparency. And... what do you think about opening the job search information spot that Gille-sama talked about and selling specialities from each village at the base in the royal capital? The mobile library will get tax benefits because it’ll be a part of business, right?”

Usually, you would need to tax things when you set up a shop. It would be difficult for the mobile library to handle fresh produce given the frequency it would visit the villages. But that shouldn’t be a problem with non-perishable items or handicrafts. It won’t be a large amount, but I hope that it could be used as part of the operating expenses.

“That’s right. The villagers will feel like they’re contributing to the project if you deal with the village products. It’s not a bad idea,” Vernoux said, as he slowly stretched while still sitting down.

“I told His Highness about this the other day. He said it was an excellent idea, so it would be easier to gather supporters.”

“That’s... wonderful.”

I’m thankful that Vernoux-sama is also advancing with the plan smoothly. And I understand that it’s crucial to recruit supporters, but the reason is really bugging me. I know that the final word of His Highness is an incredible help... but I feel complicated.

“Well, let’s leave aside the supporters for now and let an adult see the draft. If you’re going to do this, then you should secure the headquarters as soon as possible.”

“Okay. Mm, about the person who we should consult...”

“Oh, I thought we should let Earl Pameradia see it.”

“Huh?”

Cordelia never expected that Vernoux would recommend Elvis and her eyes widened in surprise. She had thought he would recommend Marquis Flantheim.

Vernoux shrugged when he saw that she was stunned.

“Are you that surprised?”

“Yes.”

“Well, of course, you would be. Actually, I feel bad for placing all the burden on you, so I talked to father about the mobile library straight away. But he kept insisting that I ask Earl Pameradia about this first.”

“Why...?”

Has Otou-sama ever done something like this? But, Vernoux’s answer was completely different from what she had imagined it would be.

“He said that he’d never seen the Earl thinking about children before, so he wants to see it at least once.”

“... I’m glad he’s having fun.”

Cordelia hadn’t said that he had bad taste, but her cheeks twitched a little. *The Marquis seems to be the same as always.*

(I’m sorry, Otou-sama.)

However, Vernoux’s recommendation was a godsend.

“Do you have any problems with this, Dilly?”

“No. I also want to hear Otou-sama’s opinion, so it’s fine.”

“I see, then that’s good. Well, let’s take a break for now...”

“Mm, Vernoux-sama. I have something I want to talk to you about before we have tea.”

“What is it?”

Cordelia deliberately pretended to be troubled when Vernoux tilted his head.

“I’m changing the topic, but it turns out that Sensei knew that I am Earl Pameradia’s daughter from the beginning.”

Probably because she’d suddenly changed the topic, Vernoux blinked a few times at Cordelia’s sudden confession. However, he hadn’t panicked.

“Well, it’s not like she can’t guess that from your appearance. Red eyes are rare.”

“Yes. However, I want to get her in this proposal, since she already knows about that. Of course, I will also ask the villagers of Oulu Village about this in the distant future.”

Cordelia was aiming for that.

I’m going to put Otou-sama and Obaa-sama together and make a stage for them to meet... that was the purpose of the plan. Of course, I want Otou-sama to be the advisor because I expect that I would receive accurate guidance from him for this business. I can ask Obaa-sama about the children’s feelings since Otou-sama isn’t good with them. So, this plan kills two birds with one stone.

“Well, you’ll be able to reflect more if you hear the demands earlier on. Are you getting her to meet the Earl?”

“Yes, I definitely want them to meet.”

“... That was very aggressive.”

Cordelia smiled widely as Vernoux was filled with shock and admiration.

“In any case, I would like to show Sensei the greenhouse. I did get the aloe vera from her, so I want to show her that it’s growing.”

“Oh, so it’s like that? That would be a good reason to invite her to the mansion.”

Cordelia was relieved to see that Vernoux understood that. *It seems like I was able to prepare an unsuspecting stance. Vernoux-sama is sharp, so I’m relieved to see that he isn’t suspicious at all. Now all I have to do is prepare the props and support the two on the day...* The corners of her mouth raised when she thought that.

“... You’re really hyped up.”

The sight of Vernoux twitching was also trivial to Cordelia today.

◆◆◆◆◆

Afterwards, Cordelia told Elvis and Fulvia that she wanted to consult them on a plan that was related to rural education and began adjusting the schedule.

Fulvia was reluctant to agree to Cordelia’s invitation, because she was worried about it being a detriment to Elvis. But Cordelia persisted, and she finally agreed on the condition that she would only be a representative in place of the villages’ educationalists.

“But it would be about 50 years since they’ve last met, right? Otou-sama doesn’t talk much, and Obaa-sama will be nervous...”

While she was happy that they had finally decided to reunite, she thought about what kind of reunion it would be. She folded her arms and groaned.

“If I had something that would make it easier for them to open up...”

They won’t make any progress if they’re overly serious.

The best way to get them to relax is...

“Oh yes, Otou-sama said that honey lemon was nostalgic. By any chance, did Obaa-sama make them for him?”

It occurred to her that she should make lemon sweets. *I’m sure they grow a lot of lemons in the south, and it’s a lot cheaper compared to the royal capital.*

(Then, what kind of sweets should I make? If it's lemon muffins... then it wouldn't be very interesting.)

Lemon tart comes to mind, but I don't know if I can make it. She determined that it would be faster to ask than to think about it and left to see the head chef in the kitchen.

The lunchtime rush had already settled down in the kitchen, and several chefs were preparing snacks for tea-time. The head chef saw Cordelia and approached her with a smile.

“Ojou-sama, what can I do for you today?”

“We have a guest coming to visit, so I want to talk to you about the snacks we'll serve at that time. Otou-sama will be with her.”

“The Master will be?”

The head chef widened his eyes at the unusual situation.

He wouldn't be surprised if I sat with Otou-sama as he works, but this has never happened before.

“Do you know what the guest likes?”

“Let's see, I think lemon sweets... but are there any sweets with a gentle taste?”

“Then how about lemon butter cake? It's made with flour, almond powder, butter, lemon and garnished with almonds. It's an elegant and sweet cake.”

I see. That is certainly a delicious combination.

But there is a problem. Almond powder is a little more expensive than flour. It probably won't taste nostalgic.

“Can you make it without the almond powder?”

“Yes, of course. I could make it with a combination of honey and lemon if that's what you want. It's also possible to garnish it with lemon marmalade.”

“That sounds delicious. Could you make it for me to try tomorrow? And I also want to make it.”

“Understood, Ojou-sama. I will teach you how to make it.

I've roughly prepared the props.

“... I wonder if this important and big task will go well.”

She muttered and immediately shook her head.

It's not 'will it go well'. It will go well!

She thought that and smiled wryly, since she probably wouldn't be able to compose herself for a few days.

Act 42: Real Intentions

The day that would be convenient for Elvis and Fulvia to meet was four days after she'd discussed it with Elvis.

She was surprised that it was earlier than what she had scheduled, but it was good news, since she wanted them to meet.

(Maybe Otou-sama changed his schedule for this.)

I hadn't heard that he would have the day off. I have to live up to his expectations if he did change his schedule. I'll talk about the mobile library plan like I planned to, but most importantly, I hope that they can both talk about their recent situations.

I chose the greenhouse as the meeting place.

Cordelia prepared the tablecloth with Emina. She usually left that to Emina, but she had wanted to do it.

(I wonder if this is alright.)

Lastly, Cordelia arranged flowers on the table and set it up.

Ronnie came into the greenhouse as if he had been waiting for the right moment.

"Ojou-sama, Sensei is here."

"I'm coming. Emina, can you prepare the tea? I'll do the rest when Sensei gets here, I don't mind if you move back."

"Yes, Ojou-sama."

Cordelia and Ronnie headed to the entrance.

She told Ronnie about Fulvia in the same way that she had told Vernoux.

She arrived at the entrance and curtsied to Fulvia, who had been waiting there.

"I'm sorry for making you wait, Sensei."

"It's okay. Thank you for inviting me."

"I know this is sudden, but would you like to go to the greenhouse?"

Fulvia had spoken in a tone which was different from her usual because she was in the Pameradia mansion. *I also know that Obaa-sama can't just call me 『Dilly-chan』 here. It's also impossible to talk calmly here, somewhere that's easily noticeable.*

(... The public gaze isn't the only problem.)

Things progressed that far because she was motivated to get the two to meet, but anxiety flickered through her when she saw how tense Fulvia was.

I haven't missed anything because I was in such a rush, right?

(It's okay. It's fine. Nothing will progress if I get anxious here.)

She told Ronnie to call Elvis and guided Fulvia to the greenhouse as she told herself that.

Fulvia muttered.

“... There are a lot of bright flowers here.”

“There's no one here, so please don't worry. I get nervous when Sensei talks like that.”

Cordelia smiled a little while looking at Fulvia. Actually, she had been anxious since before Fulvia arrived, but she had no choice but to misrepresent that right now, and Fulvia was acting formal and restless towards her.

“But...”

“At least until Otou-sama gets here... What do you think?”

Fulvia looked a little puzzled.

“Is calling you 『Dilly-chan』 better?”

“Yes. Because I can calm down.”

Fulvia didn't change her expression but accepted, “Ok.”

“Thank you very much. And... this is the greenhouse. I'm also growing the aloe vera I got here.”

“It's wonderful and amazing.”

“You might already know this, but this is Otou-sama's design. It's also been improved little by little since it was constructed and the inside is made with glass so I can adjust the temperature and humidity levels.”

“Please,” Cordelia showed Fulvia inside the glasshouse and stood behind her so that she could look around.

They were the only two people inside of the glasshouse, and Fulvia slowly began walking inside.

“You're growing a lot of herbs.”

“The herbs I'm growing here are those I collected from the mountains, but I've also rented some fields to grow herbs outside. However, I research here to investigate the relationship between medicinal herbs and magics in development, and adjust the soil in the fields.”

“The flowers here are as vibrant as the ones that grow in the wild.”

Cordelia quietly stared at Fulvia who had kneeled down and stretched her hands out at the flowers.

The entrance of the greenhouse finally opened before long.

“Ojou-sama, Master is here.”

Standing behind Ronnie, Elvis had a poker-face as usual. Ronnie said, “Then, please excuse me,” before leaving.

When the three of them were left, the first one to speak was Elvis.

“... I apologise that my daughter has selfishly called you here.”

“It’s fine, don’t mention it.”

The aura was very stiff.

And heavy.

No one said anything else.

She had expected it, but the two hadn’t had a moving reunion when they met...

However, Cordelia felt relief rather than discouragement. Fulvia was looking down, and Elvis’s gaze didn’t leave his guest like always. However, it would really end as a meeting between an Earl and his guest if he acted too much like an Earl.

(Then this would be pointless.)

Cordelia thought and smiled. She wanted them to face each other if she wanted to change the situation. Then, she would have to make the first move.

“Please come this way. I will prepare tea.”

Cordelia guided them to the table and prepared the tea utensils in a practised manner. She placed sweets and tea in front of both of them and distributed the documents that she made.

“This is the main reason why I have called you here today. I currently want to do welfare work with supporters starting from Vernoux-sama, the son of Marquis Flantheim. It is a project to deliver books to children in mountain villages far from the royal capital... It does have a temporary name. We are calling it the mobile library project.”

“Mobile library, you say?”

“Yes. It is currently difficult for villages away from the royal capital to get books. So, we wrote down a plan to get a carriage to deliver books to those villages. However, we believe that they would shun fees, since they wouldn’t be familiar with books, so we are currently adjusting the plan towards not collecting a usage fee.”

I considered making a service for purchasing books if they want a special book, but that isn’t the theme of the plan.

Elvis didn’t mention that either.

“What are you going to do about the capital?”

“Basically, we’re thinking of setting it up with a corporate status and getting donations from supporters every year. The supporter list and donation estimates are included in the third page.”

“That’s a large number of people.”

“That’s because Vernoux-sama reached out to them, and His High Sylvester also showed an interest in this.”

Cordelia added, and Elvis nodded lightly.

Fulvia opened her eyes wide, “The royal family...?”

“We’re going to buy books with the donations or have the supporters to donate books. We’ll also establish an office at the royal capital to use as a base. In addition to storing books, we also want to sell specialities from the villages at the base. We also want to use it as a source of information which can be used by both the villages and the royal capital. What do you think of this plan?”

Elvis dropped his eyes onto the documents and opened his mouth after a while.

“As far as I can see, it’s not impossible to achieve. However, this is under the condition that you plan a little more and do preliminary meetings.”

“... I think so too. Because the villages aren’t losing anything.”

Fulvia continued after Elvis had spoken.

Cordelia was relieved that they hadn’t said anything negative about the plan.

“We can’t rent an office in the royal capital because we’re children. Otou-sama, would you help me with this?”

“I can do that much.”

“Thank you very much. Then, I would like to discuss the next matter, with you two. We are thinking about stocking picture books, fairy tales and history books. We’re thinking of obtaining some books for adults to read too, but I want to know what books would make this plan more successful.”

Elvis frown deepened when Cordelia said that.

“...”

“Otou-sama...?”

“You should ask Marquis Flantheim if you’re looking for picture books or fairy tales. He prefers them quite a lot.”

(Otou-sama, isn’t that passing the task onto someone else...?)

Even if he had made an appropriate recommendation, from what I’ve heard from Vernoux-sama, Marquis Flantheim would just boo at that. Cordelia smiled wryly inside.

(... No, Marquis Flantheim might be pleased with this.)

I thought he would protest for a moment, but the Marquis might smile and say, “That Elvis is relying on me!?”

(Otou-sama, I’m sorry. I can only imagine that the Marquis would be pleased no matter how this ends...)

However, that wasn’t the only thing that Elvis pointed out.

“Other than fairy tales, it would be a good idea to add maps from all over the place. It’s also an opportunity for them to learn that the world they know is narrow.”

“Maps... you say?”

Come to think of it, I remember that there was a time when I wanted a globe. I certainly remember that I wanted to know more about the unknown world.

“Sensei, what do you think?”

“If you’re going to add maps, then it might be nice to get travel journals as well. And... this isn’t about books, but there are a lot of children who like living things such as animals, birds, insects and reptiles. It might be a little expensive, but there might be a demand for illustrated encyclopaedias.”

“Illustrated encyclopaedias?”

“Yes.”

Maps and illustrated encyclopaedias are a bit more expensive than standard books. But, there might be a high demand for them even if they don’t exist in the villages. When I think like that, I would like to come to a compromise.

“Sensei, do you think Oulu Village would accept these efforts?”

“They probably would... Recently, the director asked me if she should accept support.”

The director already discussed the matter that she had told Cordelia about with Fulvia. *It will probably be okay; it does make me feel relieved.*

“Do you know anything else that children might be interested in?”

“Let’s see...”

Fulvia wanted to say something, but she immediately stopped.

Elvis also questioned that, like Cordelia, and moved his eyebrows a little.

“... Do you know something?”

“It’s not like I don’t... but it might not be suitable for a place like this.”

“Is it about books?”

“Yes... but is it really alright for me to say it?”

More questions arose for Cordelia when she saw that Fulvia was strangely hesitant.

I wonder what she wants to say. In front of Cordelia, who was waiting silently, Fulvia prepared herself and looked at Elvis and Cordelia.

“A lot of children, especially boys, like faeces... or the so-called poop.”

Fulvia sounded very serious.

Thus, Cordelia's reaction was delayed for a second, but she choked the moment she understood the meaning of Fulvia's words.

Elvis also had a massive choking fit.

That was the first time Cordelia had seen Elvis give such a big reaction.

This is... don't tell me... even Otou-sama had a period like that?

Even Otou-sama did!?

Without making eye contact with Cordelia, who was staring at him long and hard, Elvis coughed and caught his breath.

(This, Otou-sama also remembers this...?)

I can't picture that at all, but it's not strange... if it happened before he entered the Pameradia House. But I really can't imagine it, but all the more so when I remember that Obaa-sama had called him a rascal.

But, Fulvia wasn't caught up with Elvis and Cordelia's state.

"To know how the body works, it might not be elegant, but they might be interested in books about faeces. Faeces aren't waste, but a product."

Fulvia was serious until the very end, and Cordelia found it very strange.

Cordelia finally burst out laughing.



Wh-what's wrong?"

"Well, it's just... I've never seen Otou-sama agitated before! I couldn't help but think that it's something only you could do, Obaa-sama."

"Dill... Ojou-sama."

Fulvia had nearly called Cordelia how she usually did probably because she had panicked.

However, Cordelia kept telling her that she preferred it if Fulvia called her that.

"Obaa-sama, please call me Dilly like always. And Otou-sama, if things stay like this, then you're just resisting for no reason?"

"..."

It wasn't only Fulvia's attitude that had vexed her, but Elvis's as well. She took the opportunity to throw those words at Elvis.

Even Elvis should know why he got that agitated.

Cordelia didn't rush him to answer, but she didn't say anything else either.

Elvis opened his mouth before long.

"I've always wanted to apologise to you."

His voice was in no way loud.

However, it was a voice that couldn't be missed.

"When I decided to become a noble, I had decided that I would use my position and protect the people. I decided to use whatever I could to achieve that, and I have been doing it. But... the hardships you'd suffered wouldn't go away, no matter how much I do. My mother had to suffer because I was born. I'm so very sorry."

He sounded as if he was disinterested.

However, to Cordelia, it had sounded as if he had done that deliberately.

Fulvia, on the other hand, quickly shook her head.

"You're wrong, Elvis. You did nothing wrong. You were only involved in adult affairs... You were probably forced to do a lot of things. I'm really sorry."

Cordelia interrupted as silence flowed between them.

"Otouto-sama and Obaa-sama. You'll never reach an agreement with that. You don't want to give in to each other, probably because you are alike."

It would be meaningless for them to apologise to each other if they continue to say that they're both in the wrong.

I also don't plan on joining in on this conversation.

“Please look at each other. I think it would be difficult for you to believe me, no matter what I say, but it’s obvious, isn’t it? Aren’t you both saying that you want to spend more time together? And that’s not all, is it?”

““ ... ””

Elvis and Fulvia didn’t answer Cordelia. They were only looking at each other.

“We’ll talk about the mobile library at a later day.”

Cordelia said as she relaxed.

“Won’t you eat the sweets at your fingertips? I baked them.”

It took me ages to choose something that would taste nostalgic, so I want them to savour it, ———
Cordelia thought, as she took the initiative to eat the butter-cake.

Yup, delicious.

The act of reaching out to eat it before Elvis couldn’t be commended. But both of them wouldn’t move if she hadn’t done that.

“... You have an adorable daughter.”

“She’s also a little tomboyish in some places. Who the heck does she resemble?”

The two, who had frozen, looked at Cordelia and spoke.

I’m concerned about which parts of me he had meant when he’d said ‘a little tomboyish’ . But I feel like I’ll be digging my own grave if I ask that question. ——— She thought, and Fulvia helped her.

“Oh my, I’m sure she’s like you. You were such a rascal.”

“... ”

... Elvis didn’t say anything, probably because he either wouldn’t object or couldn’t.

Fulvia stared at Elvis, who was silent and eventually looked down.

“Thank you very much.”

“What...”

“I thought that it was enough to listen to your efforts and stories about how the people at your fief adore you. But I’m pleased now that we’re able to talk again.”

Elvis stared at Fulvia, who had humbled herself again, after she’d spoken in an informal tone.

“I also never thought I would have the opportunity to talk directly with mother... I’m glad we could talk.”

Elvis spoke after a long silence, and his words sounded harmless and inoffensive.

But, this is probably the most honest thing he could say. Otou-sama isn't someone who chooses his words to suit who he's talking to. He hadn't objected to this meeting because he had wanted to meet her.

After that, they ate the butter-cake and talked about their current situations... unfortunately, the latter didn't happen.

Elvis had said, "It's a nostalgic taste," when he had tried the lemon butter-cake, but the topic soon returned to the mobile library plan. *We can derail it since you two finally have the chance to talk...* Cordelia thought, but the tension that Elvis and Fulvia had felt had disappeared, so she decided that it had worked somehow. *This mother and child are probably hard workers through and through.*

◆◆◆◆◆

However, a short while after, a messenger from the castle visited the Pameradia mansion, and Elvis was summoned to the castle.

Cordelia hadn't imagined that the wrinkles between his eyebrows were deeper than when he talked with Marquis Flantheim.

Still, Elvis left the greenhouse without a sign of regret.

However, he'd said before leaving, "We'll talk again later."

After Elvis left, Cordelia told Fulvia the gist of the plan and saw her off. *Of course, there are things I can talk to her about, but I want to give them another chance to speak.*

(And since they've already met, it'll be easier to invite her over as a medicinal herb teacher...)

Of course, it's necessary to maintain a sense of distance, so that others don't get suspicious, and I know I have to take our positions into account. Still, I'm happier than when I just imagined that the gap between my two favourite people have been filled.

(And the rest...)

Cordelia thought of something else.

She called out to Emina, who was cleaning up since there were no guests left, in the greenhouse while gazing at a nearby flower.

"Say, Emina. I have something to ask you."

"Yes, Ojou-sama?"

"Won't you deliver this flower to Okaa-sama?"

Emina frowned when she heard Cordelia's question.

Cordelia hadn't mentioned her mother at all in these past few years. The relationship between the two hadn't changed at all, since long ago, so Emina never expected that Cordelia would say that.

Even so, Cordelia smiled.

“Okaa-sama likes white flowers, doesn’t she? I received this flower bulb from Nirupama as a gift from her fief. I’m sure that Okaa-sama misses it.”

I know that Okaa-sama asks the maids to put white flowers in her room.

However, Emina’s expression didn’t clear up with Cordelia’s explanation.

“Stop looking like that. I won’t force her to meet me. I just don’t want her to hate me more than she already does. She might accept the flowers since they’ve done nothing wrong.”

Moreover... she slightly thought.

The main reason why I had given up on talking to her was that this isn’t linked to my uneasy future.

But... also because I don’t want to be hated.

I also avoided her because I didn’t want to hear negative words from Okaa-sama, whom I’ve never had a direct conversation with.

But, I don’t think I’m not hated just because I avoid her.

Take a chance... or instead, there’s nothing to lose since it’s already broken.

“Of course, if coming into contact with me will bring Okaa-sama stress, then I won’t send it. I don’t want to pester her. So, please?”

“... Understood.”

From Emina’s expression, I understand that it probably wouldn’t fare well. Okaa-sama and I don’t have a good relationship, not because of a problem that existed between us.

Even so, I won’t be depressed about it.

Even if our relationship doesn’t improve, if Okaa-sama likes the flowers, then I will continue to send them.

I don’t think that all my wishes will come true.

But if I don’t make an effort, then none of them will.

If I give up, then even a slightly misplaced button won’t return.

“It suits me better to take a chance.”

If it’s no good, then I’ll think about it later.

She thought, as she touched the white petals with her fingertips.



Extra 01: When Happiness Comes Around

“Ojou-sama. What are you doing with those sweets?”

“Sensei came just before noon. She gifted me them then.”

After lunch in the laboratory, Cordelia put the basket of sweets made by Fulvia on the table. Ronnie stared at the sweets as he said, “Ooh.”

Today, Cordelia discussed the mobile library plan, which had been interrupted last time, with Elvia and Fulvia before noon. *I wouldn't say that... the second meeting was peaceful, but they weren't strangely tense.*

(The mood would have changed a little if Otou-sama had smiled a little more.)

Otou-sama would have smiled when he was little, so Obaa-sama would know what he looks like when he smiles. Perhaps, it was hard for him to make an awkward vibrant expression because I was there, but it was hard to leave since I had put them together. Or, his poker-face might be frozen because he's had it for so long.

Obaa-sama didn't seem to mind, and it would be unfortunate if I break the mood with my weird concern. I just won't worry about it too much. No matter how expressionless he is, Otou-sama will laugh when he wants to. And, his aura was gentle, so that's enough for now.

“There's a lot of sweets in there, but is there perhaps one for me?”

“Of course. Let's call Lara and Emina too. We can eat it together.”

“Yay. That's a butter cookie, isn't it?”

“Yes. But we've just had lunch, so I'll leave it here until snack time.”

Ronnie dropped his shoulders because he wanted to eat it now.

“Then, what are you going to do until snack time?”

“I think I'll carve some soap.”

“Oh, are you going to do that?”

Cordelia smiled wryly at Ronnie who seemed like he wanted to say he'd forgotten. *I couldn't get around to it, so I've only worked on it a bit by thinking of the design.*

“Why don't you join me, Ronnie?”

“I'd like to see it when it's finished, so please tell me when it's done.”

Ronnie responded indifferently, but she didn't mind since he had said he wasn't interested in making it before.

(Now, let's get started.)

There are different methods to drafting and carving. For instance, even with flowers, the method for carving roses and chrysanthemum are different. To carve roses you need to overlap the petals together,

but for chrysanthemum, you overlap the petals while not letting them touch. I've also modelled soap after tarts and cakes, but in that case, I would have to carve the patterns faintly into the soap in the same way you'd cut patterns into katanuku cookies.

I plan on making prototypes of all the things I remember, to check the condition of the soaps, but that's going to take some time. So, I'll just make what I want to make first.

Cordelia thought, as she took a toolbox from the cupboard. There were soaps and a knife, which she had prepared beforehand, and a small, shallow, wooden box inside.

"Ojou-sama, you're carving soap, aren't you? What're you using the box for?"

"I'm not going to be using this as a box, I'm going to be using this as a wooden frame. I thought I could make a wreath if I line up the carved soap in this."

Of course, it would be beautiful even if I just make the wreath with soap, but it's challenging to think of the design, and it's difficult to make since a lot of connecting motifs are needed. I don't dare to try it since it's my first time making it in this body and I don't know how the soaps are.

(And, it looks cute lined up.)

The gentle-coloured soap looks softer than it seems, and it would look nice on a wall... probably. But, that's only if I make it well.

"Are you giving that to Sensei by any chance?"

"Oh my, how did you know that?"

"I thought you wanted to thank her for the sweets. And if you only wanted to check the soap, then you wouldn't arrange it like a decoration after carving it."

Cordelia nodded a little.

"Then, I hope you can carve a nice present for Sensei."

"Thanks."

"Snack time seems like it would be late if you don't finish it."

Cordelia picked up the white and light pink soap while receiving some support that left her with doubts about whether he really wished her luck.

The flower that she was thinking of carving now was cosmos. When making cosmos, you first need to make a base by carving the soap into a circle with the diameters of a flower. Then, the flower core is cut at the centre. After that, the outer circumference is divided into eight equal portions, the grooves are shaved thickly, and carved to look like petals. Finally, she needed to make flower veins that went from the inside of the petal to the outside to complete the carving.

"That was surprisingly quick."

"Isn't it cute?"

"It is. I thought... you would make something rougher."

She hadn't finished as fast as Ronnie had said, but it didn't take long to make a motif like that. She repeated it and completed several white and light pink cosmos.

She picked up another soap once she had completed a set number. *This one is a bright golden yellow. It looks like I'll be able to make accents with this.*

Cordelia cut the soap to about five millimetres and pulled out a small metal flower mould from the toolbox. She drew several lines from the centre to the outside on the yellow flowers that she had made a lot of but didn't decorate them much. She had made these small flowers as an accent to balance out the big flowers, so she didn't mind if they were plainer than the cosmos.

Cordelia then carved additional leaves. She made round leaves found on common flowers instead of leaves found on cosmos, but they seemed to go well together. Lastly, she arranged the soap into the small box to confirm the balance.

A small flower garden was completed in the box.

"Ojou-sama, do you like cosmos?"

"Yes, I do."

She felt calm when she stared at the flowers, which suited the meanings of 『Harmony』 and 『Modesty』 in the language of flowers. Cosmos had different meanings in the language of flowers depending on its colour, but the white that she had just carved meant 『Grace』 and 『Beauty』, and she thought it suited Fulvia well.

(I hope Obaa-sama likes cosmos.)

Cordelia, who put the flowers in the frame while thinking about a lot of things, asked Ronnie what he thought of it.

"How's this?"

"It's not bad... but isn't it better to make it a lot more energetic, since you're the one who made it?"

"For example?"

"Like by adding roses."

"..."

The thing that Ronnie had said smoothly was a high hurdle.

Cordelia knew how to carve roses, but at the same time, she also knew how challenging it was. If possible, she wanted to avoid making it today since she hadn't done it in a long time.

But, like Ronnie had said, if I want to make it more 『me』, then I should try. This is a gift for Obaa-sama. If I can add something that seems like me, then I want to do it.

(It's okay if I fail. I should try to make it with all my feelings.)

I don't have to add it as part of the wreath if I fail. The other disadvantage is that Ronnie would see something ugly, but that's not a big blow. I'm worried about making it, but he did suggest it... and I agree with him, so I can't just not make it.

(Alright, let's do it.)

Cordelia readied herself and prepared a soap the same size as the one she's used for the base of the cosmos and first carved a cylinder at the centre to act as the flower core. She carved the grooves around the cylinder deeper than she had with the cosmos. The core of the rose was much more complicated than the cosmos', and she had to carve a lot of petals. She continued her detailed work to maintain balance while picking up her knife, putting it down and chamfering.

She finally finished the flower core, and it was now time to make the outside petals. She carefully dug out the petals so that they had volume and carved out the unnecessary parts at a calm pace.

Cordelia exhaled heavily at the end of the process.

I think a lot of time has passed since I started and finished this piece.

"How's this?"

Cordelia asked Ronnie while handing him the rose she'd just made.

"It's better than I imagined. I was surprised by the cosmos, but this surprised me more."

"I'm glad I could surprise you."

"It's like it was made from stone. You're good."

She was glad that he was impressed, but she was gradually becoming embarrassed because he was looking at her work too seriously.

"... Mm, I made some mistakes on that. So, I'm thinking of remaking it once more for the gift..."

I think it was done well for something I haven't made in a long time, but it itches to be praised that much. If I think I can make it better, then I should do it now.

"You still have soaps you have to test, right? Isn't it fine to challenge yourself if you want to do it, Ojou-sama?"

"Yeah."

"However, I'll be happy if you could finish by tea time."

"Then, why don't you stop me if I get too enthusiastic, Ronnie?"

I'm looking forward to the cookies from Obaa-sama too. It's reassuring to rely on Ronnie so that I don't miss my chance to eat it. Ronnie replied with reliable words, "Leave it to me."

Cordelia heard his reply and picked a light pink soap this time. She began making the rose again while paying attention to the places which she felt had been badly made before.

Ronnie asked Cordelia.

“But, making a soap wreath... I mean, are you thinking of making it into a circle? You can place it freely if you put it in a frame.”

“Isn’t round cute?”

“Well, it is... that’s all?”

“Well. And... it’s easy to arrange once I’ve decided on what to do?”

“... You’re surprisingly impulsive?”

Cordelia smiled silently at Ronnie. *I do have a reason for making it into a circle, but it’s a little embarrassing to say.*

A circle is a motif that represents 『eternity』.

I want Obaa-sama will continue to have a quiet and peaceful life... I chose a wreath with that hope in mind.

(A standard wood-based wreath would be cute, but Obaa-sama would be able to make it better.)

In that case, I wanted to make her a present that she couldn’t make. And if I was going to make a wood-base wreath, then I want Obaa-sama to teach me.

(If she could teach me, then I’ll like to give it to Otou-sama... But would it be difficult to display something in his room?)

Would he accept it if it’s small enough to fit on a drawer? While Cordelia was thinking, Ronnie was looking at the rose again as he rolled it in his hands.

“Do you want to try, Ronnie?”

“No, I’ll refrain.”

Ronnie didn’t have any desire to make one, even though he seemed interested. Cordelia shrugged since that was just like him.

“I just thought that it would be popular with young ladies. When I was watching you make it, it looked like it could be carved with light force.”

The effects of this custom-made knife might have made it easier to carve. It’s easier to carve with this knife because it had been adjusted with magic when it was created. But, now that I’ve checked the conditions of the soaps made by Eris firm, I think standard knives should be enough to carve them.

“Why don’t you make one for Hazel-sama? I’m sure she’ll be pleased.”

“Yes, I was planning to.”

And, if possible, I want to make it together... If she thinks like that, then I hope that it would become the start of a new trend. But these soaps haven’t been scented yet. It smells like clean soap, but I want to add different aromas to each soap. In the first place, the main reason why Eris Firm undertook the development of easy-to-carve soap was because of that.

“... And it’s about time. Emina will probably come soon to prepare tea, so let’s clean up,” Ronnie, who hadn’t forgotten the duty that Cordelia had asked him to do earlier, said.

“Thank you for remembering.”

“It was something I wasn’t going to forget.”

And, as Ronnie had predicted, Emina came to the laboratory with Lara not long after.

The cookies that everyone ate had a gentle taste.

The completed wreath was later delivered to Fulvia by Ronnie.

A few days later, Cordelia saw the wreath hanging outside the entrance when she visited Fulvia. She was relieved that Fulvia had liked it.

Cordelia gave Hazel the carved soap almost at the same time and received an immediate reply from Hazel saying that she wanted to make it together with Cordelia.

Apparently, her goal was moving towards success.

Extra 02: To See Someone Happy

(Lara's Perspective)

I sighed as the wooden prototype pencil in my hand broke.

“Unfortunately, this is also a failure.”

“I’ll leave it to you, Lara,” Ojou-sama asked me to make a pencil. Since I’ve nearly reached the final stages, I’ve made no progress with this.

I had no difficulty in saying that the lead was complete. The combination of graphite and clay, the temperature at which to heat the lead, and the solvent for fixing the lead to the wood... I was able to discover those with the help of the Onee-sama’s from the magician wing.

And yet...

“I can’t believe that this handy pencil sharpener is going to turn into my enemy...”

Until recently, I sharpened the pencil with a knife and adjusted the pencil when the lead got buried in the wood, and I couldn’t write anymore. However, Ojou-sama lightly said, “Let’s make a pencil sharpener so it’ll be easier to sharpen,” and she taught me about a tool which can sharpen part of the wood by making a hole in a small piece of wood that was the size of my thumb, attach blades, and sharpen the pencil by turning it. It was able to shave wood thinly using little power like a planer.

When I heard about it, Ronnie just happened to be nearby. He had said, “Then, let’s make one,” and made me a sample... but, that super useful tool that shaves pencils easily has posed me with a challenge.

I have no problems when I shave the wood with a knife, but when I turn the pencil in the tool to sharpen it, the wood that had been stuck together get stuck in the blade sometimes, and the wood might crack if I forcefully turn it. That wasn’t all, but I ended up with a lot of defective products.

“I wonder if there’s not enough pressure when the wood is being glued together. I can’t see any gaps at a glance...”

I was going to use stronger pressure, but it’s probably still not enough. Or is there some other problem? I wanted to complete this as soon as possible because Ojou-sama went through great pains to think of this for the children, but it hasn’t been going well. There’s nothing wrong with using it for writing, so should I just give up on the pencil sharpener and get them to shave it with a knife? Or should I just close my eyes to the defective products that are mixed in, and they can just use what they can?

However, if possible, I want to make the best product I can think of from the beginning. If bad rumours circulate from the early stages, then it would be hard to recover.

By the way, there is a writing tool which uses graphite in this world. However, it’s mainly used for painting and are cut up into specific sizes. But, unlike the pencil that Ojou-sama thought of, it’s wrapped in cloth like a stone and used like that. It was challenging to write with under normal

circumstances and was hard to hold since it got tiny the more you use it. Plus it's costly. Apparently, the reason is that they took too much graphite when it was discovered.

There is that situation, so it's normal to write with a pen and ink. On the other hand, pencils which are made with a mixture of graphite, are going to be excellent writing tools which are easy to hold and cheap.

Yes, only if I complete it.

"Alright, let's put a little more force next time."

If Ojou-sama is doing her best for the children, then I also want to contribute. So I have to do my best like Ojou-sama.

I made up my mind, and there was a knock at the laboratory door.

When I answered, the door opened quietly. It was Ojou-sama, the owner of this laboratory.

"You're here early today, Lara."

"Ojou-sama, you too. Didn't you have class this morning?"

"I did. But I finished everything that I was supposed to study today."

As expected of Ojou-sama. The servants secretly say that her diligence makes the tutor cry. I think Ojou-sama is working hard to secure her free time, but she probably absorbed information greedily in the first place. Thanks to that, I'm happy that I get to hear good stories, but I think Ojou-sama's tutor has it tough.

"Why are you here early, Lara?"

"It's been drizzling since morning, right? I was supposed to wash the large curtains in the saloon, but it won't dry if I hang it like this, so I had free time."

"Oh my, that's too bad."

"Yes. I wanted to finish it today if I could."

I had done a special shift yesterday and finished a lot of tasks so that I could do the washing today. I was a little disappointed that my schedule was messed up. People did say that it might rain today, but there were stars in the sky last night, so I thought it would be fine.

"There's nothing you can do about the weather. Try again another day."

Ojou-sama looked at me with pity.

"Ojou-sama, you also hate rain, don't you?"

"Mm, you can't hear it when it's drizzling, but I like the sound and smell of rain."

"I don't like it very much. Because my hair gets messy."

My hair isn't as beautiful as Ojou-sama's, even so, I'm not disappointed. But my hair is untameable when it rains.

“It might have to do with your hair quality... but how about changing your shampoo? Why don’t you ask Ronnie about what you can buy with your wages?”

“I don’t think he would know much about shampoo...”

“Maybe he’ll ask Eris Firm for you. It might just be consoling, but why don’t you try it?”

I would certainly appreciate it if my hair changed, but I was a little surprised that I hadn’t thought about that before. It might be categorised as beauty knowledge, but I think it’s great that she could come up with something that I can try.

“You’ve grown your hair a little.”

“Yes.”

“Do you want to cut it? Emina’s good with haircuts, so she’ll cut it for you if you ask her.”

I wanted to grow my fringe out, so I didn’t want to cut it. I don’t have to worry about not knowing when I have to wash my hair now, and I would like to grow it out if I can. If I tie my hair up like Emina does, then it shouldn’t get in the way of my work.

“You can grow it out. But, if you grow your hair out, it can get damaged if you don’t trim it.”

“Huh? Cut it to grow it?”

“Yes. It becomes messy if you just grow your hair out, so let’s style it properly so that it can grow out beautifully.”

“Then... I’ll cut it a little.”

It’s a little troublesome that I have to take a detour if I want to grow my hair out, since it won’t grow beautifully if I don’t cut it. But I also don’t want it to get damaged as it grows. I can’t maintain my hair like Ojou-sama does, but I don’t plan on growing it that long... it’s important to follow Ojou-sama’s advice if I want to grow my hair as beautifully as I can.

“I’ll give you a hair ornament if you grow your hair beautifully. How about a barrette?”

“Eh, that’s bad!”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? We have to celebrate it growing beautifully. I’m looking forward to seeing it grow.”

As she spoke, Ojou-sama looked happy, but I don’t think my hair will live up to her expectations, and I don’t think I need a present to celebrate me growing my hair... it’s kind of embarrassing. But, if it’s something I want to do, and it’s something that will make Ojou-sama happy then... Hey, don’t get swept up!

“Ojou-sama, celebrations are something you do at important times.”

“That’s right. That’s why we’re celebrating. I think having an image change is like getting a fresh start, and is an important milestone. Don’t you think?”

“It’s not a big deal, though...”

“In any case, you’ll need something to tie your hair together. It won’t get in your way, so just take it.”

I was skilfully manipulated by Ojou-sama, but I didn't really stand a chance in the first place. If there's something I can do to oppose her, then it would be to find something to congratulate her for. Ojou-sama does a lot of things, so I'm sure I can find something to congratulate her for. It's fine.

"You were working on the pencils, weren't you?"

"Eh, yes."

Partly because of my poor progress, my voice cracked at her surprise attack.

"Seeing how you reacted, I don't think I'll be able to hear that it's complete."

"I'm sorry I wanted to finish it quickly..."

"You don't have to rush. You can do it until you're satisfied. I'm the one who asked you to make this, after all."

Ojou-sama said, but I know that it's better if I complete it quickly. Of course, I can't give her a defective product, and I don't want to do it half-heartedly since Ojou-sama left this task to me.

But, I know that she didn't think that I could finish this alone.

Even if I receive hints from Ojou-sama, it's difficult for me to clear her requirement level since I haven't done anything up until now. Therefore, I started by consulting with the Onee-samas in the magician's wing about the lead under Ronnie's recommendation. The Onee-samas are all good people, and they willingly gave me advice, and they explained things carefully when I didn't understand. I managed to get to this point thanks to them...

That was when I noticed.

Ojou-sama's real goal wasn't 『for me to finish the pencil』 but 『for me to get along with the Onee-samas』.

I can't help but feel that Ojou-sama is really considerate towards me. I firmly believe that I want to be useful by completing the pencil well, improve my guard techniques and of course, memorize the jobs that servants have to do. I feel at ease by Ojou-sama's side.

But I'm a little anxious... I wonder if I should ask her about it now.

"Say, Ojou-sama. Do you really think that the pencils will be useful?"

Of course, I think they would be. However, I was worried that this might have been my bias view as someone who is making it.

"Oh my, why are you asking that?"

"See, because... stuff written in pen looks nicer. Well, it's easier to carry pencils around, and it doesn't take much time to write with them.... But, for example, I wouldn't mind if I took notes down and it smudged or got erased."

I'm worried about whether people would use something that is being introduced to the world for the first time, but it's not a problem if we're only making it to distribute at the school for now. Still, I'm

worried that it wouldn't be released if it's not comfortable and easy to use... It might be okay if I made the pencils well, but I couldn't wipe away my fears.

However, in contrast to me, who was worrying, Ojou-sama smiled.

"It's alright. Everyone loves things that are easy to carry."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

I swallowed my words since Ojou-sama was full of confidence.

"Thank you for worrying."

"No. I was just meddling."

"That's not true. I might have overlooked something, so please tell me whenever you have doubts. Look, I thought you were going to help me."

Ojou-sama took my prototype and traced it with her fingertips.

"But, oh, yes. In any case, to raise awareness of pencils, it would be nice to spread the word that pencils are especially useful."

"Pencils are especially useful?"

Is there such a thing? My doubts seem to have been transmitted to Ojou-sama. She thought a little and put the pencil down on the table. Instead, she took out some paper and a pen.

"What are you writing?"

"I think I'll make a magic formation."

"Magic?"

Is she planning on writing something that has to do with magic? However, it was different from what I'd imagined, and she only drew a frame. It was a frame made up of 4×4 squares for a total area of 16. If I'm forced to say it, then the only feature was that the lines were beautifully drawn even though it was done free-hand.

Ojou-sama, who created this frame, looked as if she was flicking the squares with her right thumb and index finger as she filled numbers into the squares.

"Lara, try filling it so that the answers when adding vertically, horizontally and diagonally are the same."

"Eh, can you do something like that?"

"Yes. But if you write it in with a pen, then you'll be troubled when you make a mistake, right?"

But, this is the first time I've seen something like this, so I didn't know how to solve it. I'm not good with mathematics to begin with... Will they really add to the same amount? I questioned impatiently... then I noticed it.

“Is this math practice?”

“Yes. Number puzzles are quite fun, and it’s perfect for children.”

“Yes, I know that... but isn’t it a bit too difficult?”

It’s boring if it’s easy to solve, but they’ll give up half-way if it’s too difficult. But Ojou-sama had expected my words.

“Then, I’ll give you a hint. The total is 17. So why don’t you fill in the numbers aiming for that number?”

“17?”

I wondered why it added up to that number, but I left that question for afterwards. Now that I know it adds up to 17, I can find places to fill in the numbers. I filled in the numbers and noticed I’d made a mistake.

“Ah.”

And, I reflectively blackened out my mistake... which filled in the box, and it was difficult to correct.

“It certainly is nice to erase this.”

“Right?”

I can redraw the frame, but it’s a hassle, and I have less paper space if I make more mistakes.

“You can also do 3×3 squares, and there are many ways to reduce the difficulty. Or you can make the grid 5×5 , or make it more difficult with a 9×9 grid. But it would be hard for me to write an example for that right away.”

“I think this much is fine for me.”

5×5 seems difficult. Having said that, I feel like I can solve the 3×3 frame. See, I feel like I can get it even if I guess.

Next to me, Ojou-sama looked as if she was still thinking, “Hmm.”

“I also know other simple number puzzles.”

“What are they like?”

“First of all, make a frame of nine blocks. Three horizontal and three vertical, making it a 3×3 . Put some numbers in the boxes to act as hints. The column and row as well as the same block can’t contain the same numbers.”

“That sounds like a difficult rule. Ojou-sama, could you draw me an example?”

“Hmm. It takes a while to make an example, so I’ll explain it with drawings first.”

Ojou-sama filled in numbers while explaining situations that would violate the rule. Unlike the previous magic formation, this didn’t need calculations. If I had to say, then I feel like this required observation without missing hints. I might like this more than the magic formation.

“And... oh yes, it’s like a riddle, but how about crossword puzzles?”

“Do you like crosswords?”

As she continued to proposal number puzzles, I was surprised at the different puzzles there were, and Ojou-sama nodded.

“But I’ll have to make a lot of quizzes, so I’ll make it for you next time. Will you solve it for me then?”

“Of course, leave it to me!”

I couldn’t imagine what the puzzles would look like. But, pencils seem like they would be useful for both. I’m sure crossword puzzles are also done with pencil.

Later, Ojou-sama made the crossword puzzle she had promised me. The answer portion was made in a grid-like the number puzzle, but some squares were blackened out, and there were small numbers on the white boxes. Outside the grid, there were quizzes for the vertical and horizontal boxes, and each problem number was linked with a number in the boxes. The starting point is to write the answer. As I filled in the answers, the vertical and horizontal characters intersect, and that also became a hint.[1]

“It might be fun to fill in it.”

None of the questions was difficult either. But rather than being able to solve the problems, I feel like I want to fill it quickly when I see the boxes filled in little by little... I wonder if it’s perfect to say that I was getting more and more addicted to it.

“Say, Ojou-sama. You can use this as a review quiz for the children, right?”

The crossword Ojou-sama made was filled with general knowledge, but it seems fun to fill this in while reviewing. Ojou-sama hummed at me, “Mm.”

“Let’s see. I think it will be difficult just to make it on review questions, but I think it would be possible if other questions were mixed in too. But, it might be difficult for them to come up with an answer if other questions are mixed in too...”

“Then, can I try to make one when I finish the pencil? Ojou-sama, I’ll get you to solve it. If it’s hard to understand, then I don’t mind if you refuse... but can I?”

If Ojou-sama doesn’t have enough time, then I can make it, can’t I? Of course, I have to study hard, but it’s something that children learn. I think they’re things I should know.

“It’s fine? It’ll probably be more difficult than you think.”

“But I want to try.”

I want to progress positively because the pencils are going to be useful. And... I also wanted to make the questions.

“Then, please do so.”

“Leave it to me!”

I was motivated to make pencils. I want to quickly make questions. Ah, but I have to make a good eraser to correct with...

“You don’t have to rush. You’ll overdo it if you’re too enthusiastic.”

“Yes, of course!”

But it seems fun. I get hyped up when I think about making something that people might enjoy. I have to do my best so that it doesn’t interfere with my work at the mansion. I’m hyped up.

This is the sequel, but in the future, when Aisha-sama visits the laboratory, she will discover Ojou-sama’s number puzzle.

She did it to kill time, and it also becomes popular with the knights. Shortly afterwards, the puzzle showed up at the corner of a newspaper that was printed in the royal capital.

“This may increase the number of people waiting for pencils.”

Ojou-sama said as she worried about how to use the reward she’d receive from the newspaper. She looked thrilled.

Epilogue: To Exchange Words

Gille's Perception

The wind blowing in from the slightly opened window is gentle and comfortable. The sunny weather is surely calming the hearts of the people who live in town.

A knock sounded at my door.

This sound is definitely Vernoux.

"Come in."

"Hey, Gille. What're you reading?"

"Hello, Vernoux. I'm reading the record of proceedings I borrowed from father."

"Oh, the thing yesterday? I also heard a little about it from father. They're planning to organise part of the northern district in the royal capital, right?"

"Yeah. They add a lot of illegal buildings in that district, and it's hard for people to walk around. There are also a lot of quarrels there."

"They'll probably argue about solving it too, but that's inevitable."

The place in question tends to prioritise customs over laws, so the congressional decisions will also lead to backlashes. However, Congress isn't making this decision on their own. They're improving the area because the local residents complained. Of course, it would be ideal if there is a solution that would satisfy everyone, but even God wouldn't be able to find such a solution.

"It's no use, but I want to reduce the number of dissatisfied people... but this is the most I can do."

People living under the law should not suffer disadvantages.

What is right, and what is wrong?

Even though there is a congress, I will make the final decision someday. I feel again that my ideas have an influence on people's lives, even from a piece of paper.

"Father is amazing."

"His Majesty is asking you to watch him. He wants you to study from him while you can."

"That's right. Father is always thinking of my welfare so that I won't be troubled in the future. If I can live up to his expectations... No, I have to live up to them."

"You don't have to correct yourself. That part of you is really diligent."

Vernoux sat on the sofa where he usually sat. That sofa is like his reserved seat, so I always put sweets there for him. I put bottle orange peels there today. I like eating things as they are, but for Vernoux, who loves sweets, I placed some chocolate coated orange peels there. Vernoux knew that those were for him, so he opened the lid without waiting for my permission.

"I was surprised when His Majesty suddenly showed up in the study room in the morning and called you... So it was to give you that record of proceedings."

"Yeah, no, that was different. I got this at breakfast."

"Really? Then, what did he want?"

Vernoux asked while eating the orange peel. His actions aren't commendable as a Marquis's son... but this is Vernoux, so it can't be helped now.

"That's... not a big deal."

"Surprisingly, you're hesitating. Was it about an arranged marriage?"

"You know, don't put me in your shoes."

"Hey. Both you and Dilly. What kind of person do you think I am?"

"I'm joking."

I think Vernoux was joking, but it's not funny to me, so I want him to stop.

But fortunately, that wasn't what father informed me.

"Father told me to do a better job at sneaking out."

"His Majesty did?"

"Father silently approves of me going to Sensei's place, right? But, that's only silent approval. Clay complained that I quickly disappear whenever I have free time."

"Ah... Isn't it fine? You do what you have to do, so you can spend your free time however you want."

"He's obstinate as always," Vernoux frowned, but it wasn't like I couldn't understand Clay's feelings. He is simply worried that it would develop into a serious incident if something were to happen to me while I was out. Father giving me silent approval instead of giving me permission when I talked to him about it is proof of the risks.

"When His Majesty was young, he would secretly sneak out of the castle, didn't he?"

"Of course, but that isn't public knowledge. I don't think Clay knows about it."

The only reason why Vernoux knows about it is because his father, Marquis Leonard Flantheim, snuck out with father. No, unlike me, I heard that father didn't want to go out, but the Marquis forced him to, "You'll suffocate if you don't go out! You won't have a fated encounter either!" "He's always been like that," father had said.

"... What're you laughing at?"

"No, it's nothing."

I'm sure Vernoux will remain as he is, no matter how old he gets.

It's a little hard to say that I thought such a thing. Because, apparently, it's eerie.

“Hmm? Well, it’s tough on you, Your Highness. Good work.”

Vernoux ended the conversation as if it was someone else’s problem and reached out for his second orange peel.

“Well, if you don’t want to stop sneaking out, then the only thing you can do is be grateful for His Majesty’s advice. You don’t want to stop, right?”

“Yeah, not at all.”

Even father gave me advice so that I wouldn’t have to stop. Of course, I’m taking a breather... but I finally get to meet Dilly, so I definitely want to avoid a situation where we could no longer meet. However, I probably can’t visit Oulu Village more, even though I want to. I have to put up with this.

“I actually wanted to see more.”

“Well, of course... Anyway, aren’t you glad you got to go to Oulu Village? Isn’t it good nourishment for you as 『Prince』?”

“Yeah.”

To create a kingdom where everyone is at peace.

I understood 『everyone』 who I couldn’t comprehend on paper because I actually talked to them. All I could do for the children in Oulu Village was play with them, but it made me strongly want to create a kingdom where everyone could live with a smile. I can’t imagine people’s happy faces if I just stayed in the castle.

“Well, yeah... But the children over there would be surprised if they found out that you’re the real prince. I mean, I don’t feel like surprised is the right word to use.”

Vernoux said, and I smiled wryly.

“Vernoux looks more like a 『Prince』 to the children than I do. They wouldn’t find out the truth.”

I said lightly, and Vernoux stopped the hand that was reaching for a new orange peel.

“Stop it. I’m getting goosebumps.”

“Really?”

I’m sure they would be surprised if they found out that Vernoux is a Marquis’s son. I think that Vernoux looks closer to the princes and typical nobles who appear in picture books.

However, Vernoux only looked bitter.

“Princes in picture books wear pumpkin pants. Someone, do something about that. Pants with vertical stripes are just unreal!”

“Even if you say that to me...”

“Do you know how I feel about being told that I look like that?”

“Do you hate it that much?”

I feel bad for Vernoux, but I can't share his feelings. He doesn't hate the position of prince, but the pumpkin pants... I can't imagine it at all. I've never worn them in the first place.

"I do."

"I see."

"Absolutely."

He emphasised firmly. I never imagined that Vernoux is obsessed with fashion, but it seems like pumpkin pants are unbearable even in his imagination. I found out something new.

"Then, isn't it better if they were naked?"

"You know, that's going too far, right?"

"Sorry. I'm kidding."

"It's too vulgar for a Prince to say. Where did you learn something like that?"

"I have an idea, but... for example, from Vernoux and others."

"Stop with your false accusations."

I didn't apologise even though Vernoux, who had thrown three orange peels into his mouth, had protested.

"Because you hate princes too much."

"Of course I do. I'm not fit to take your place even if you take out the pumpkin pants."

I blinked several times.

"I can... take that as a compliment, right?"

"You can interpret it however you want."

Vernoux's answer sounded indifferent, but he didn't deny it, so I'll interpret it how I like.

"Thanks."

"I didn't do anything you need to thank me for. But well... like you saw, children admire princes. Stand firm and don't lose heart."

"Okay. I'll do my best so that they won't say the fairy-tale princes are better."

"But don't overdo it."

After eating the orange peel, Vernoux clapped his hands lightly and leaned back on the chair.

"Well, you may be popular with children, but Dilly still wants nothing to do with you."

"No... Well, if you could stop there."

"What? I said it modestly."

I thought Vernoux looked a bit optimistic but was he worried about me after all?

I could only smile wryly when I thought that. I was able to meet and talk with her a lot as Gille, and I was given the opportunity to contact her about the mobile library as 『Sylvester』 because Vernoux had brought up my name... Dilly reacted just like I had expected her to... she frowned for a second when my name was mentioned.

She had said, 『I don't want to bother His Highness』 ... but it was difficult to accept that.

“Still, don't be discouraged.”

“Dilly doesn't get discouraged even if she's hated. She's already set an example.”

“An example?”

“Mick and Dilly. Haven't you heard that they get along now?”

I took an envelope out from the drawer because she had written about it and Vernoux sighed lightly.

“It was a pretty simple reason... is what I want to say, but I didn't talk about it with her face-to-face. What? So you're discouraged after all? Don't change your expressions in such a short time.”

“Pretend you didn't see it.”

“I'll take it as you're growing instead of being discouraged.”

Vernoux looked annoyed, but he didn't say anything else about it. Actually, rather than growing, I'd take talking and being able to meet Dilly as a small step to achieving my happiness ... But putting it into words has a lot of negative points. However, I didn't say this out loud and kept it in my mind. Even if Vernoux took back his previous compliment, it was uncool, and I can't change the situation if I don't face forward.

“Oh yeah, did you eat the muffin properly?”

“I did. I had to eat it while it was still delicious because Dilly made it. It's a waste, though.”

“You don't have to worry so much. She said that she would make you more if you ask her to.”

“Um. I'm pleased.”

I think this is one of the reasons that improved my depression.

I couldn't help but be surprised when Vernoux delivered me the muffin that Dilly had made. Because I couldn't imagine a noble lady making sweets herself.

But I was happy.

So I couldn't make up my mind about whether to eat it or not, but gradually I got to the point where I thought it would be rude to not eat it while it was at the most delicious, and had it for dinner.

Dilly probably can't guess what I'm thinking, I thought as I ate the muffin.

“But... I want to ask her to make them again, but I'm a little worried about asking.”

“What're you worried about? Dilly said it was alright, so you don't have to worry about her saying no, right?”

“No, that’s not it... I’m worried that she might get hurt while making sweets...”

I don’t want her to get hurt because I asked her to do something. I’m sure she has to use butter to make the muffins. If so, then she would have to use a knife, or she may get burnt.

I worried, and Vernoux looked at me in shock.

“You don’t have to worry that much. Dilly isn’t that clumsy. She probably uses a knife all the time, and I don’t think she’ll mess up and hurt herself... Oh.”

“What’s wrong?”

“No, well, it’s nothing.”

I questioned Vernoux, who had stopped artificially, and he feigned innocence. Vernoux is good at hiding things, but his reaction right now had been half-hearted. Far from being suspicious, I’m worried instead. Moreover, if this was something related to Dilly, then I couldn’t wait around for him to answer.

“What’re you hiding?”

“Nothing... I just thought that she had gotten hurt the other day. It’s only a scrape, and it’s already healed. But, it’s rare for Dilly to get hurt.”

“Hurt? Should I send some medicine?”

I said before thinking because he had said something surprising. But, Vernoux lightly shook his head.

“No, I’m telling you it’s only a scrape.”

“It won’t be good if it leaves a scar even if it’s just a scrape.”

“I said it’s already healed, didn’t I? And Dilly didn’t want to talk about it, so pretend you don’t know. I’ll be troubled if she gets angry. That’s why I was hesitant to tell you,” Vernoux continued, but I couldn’t forget what I had heard.

“Is she really alright now?”

“You know, it’s not like she’s from a house that can’t buy medicine. You’re worrying too much. It’s not a big deal when we get scrapes, right? The Earl would already get it treated if it had been a serious injury.”

“That’s true, but...”

“Then, it’s decided. You can’t ask her about it. She didn’t even tell me about it when I asked her face-to-face.”

Like Vernoux said, I had to agree with him.

But on the other hand, I didn’t want to.

Vernoux didn’t say anything, so I can’t either... it sounded like it had already been decided. Well, it has.

Of course, I know that wasn't what Vernoux meant. As he'd said, she hadn't told him anything about it even though he had asked her face-to-face, so someone who hadn't seen it shouldn't point it out.

"What? Is there something else?"

"... Nope, nothing."

There was nothing wrong with what Vernoux had said. I just thought that I was a little pathetic for thinking those thoughts.

"But I won't lose."

"What was that?"

"Nothing."

I do my best so that I won't get jealous a lot. I thought, and I heard a polite knock at the door.

"Excuse me, Sylvester-sama. It's Clive."

"Come in."

Vernoux, who heard Clive's voice and my approval, frowned a little and said, "We're still talking. He has bad timing," but he acted like he usually did when Clive entered the room and lightly raised a hand. Clive, who saw that, looked displeased as if he was responding to Vernoux. This is also something that always happens.

"... Vernoux-dono. Why are you bothering Sylvester-sama?"

"I'm not bothering him."

"I wonder about that."

Clive said as he headed straight for me. Then, he gave me a bunch of papers.

"This is the documents I told you about before."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome. Anyway... will you be staying in your room today?"

This is the first time he's asked me this honestly, but he wouldn't hold back now since he's talked to father about this. Is his patience running out?

I heard father's voice telling me to do a better job, and I smiled.

"Yeah. I don't have to train, and I have things I want to read. But, I don't plan on stopping by the library. I have to read the documents you gave me, Clive."

This is the truth.

Even if I have plans, I won't tell him the truth... I mean, I would be in trouble in the future if I'm not cunning.

Clive stayed silent for a while when he heard my answer, but he soon sighed softly.

"It doesn't seem like your affairs just involve the library, Sylvester-sama."

"You're like a noisy mother-in-law, Clay. The castle is huge, there's no way he would just go to the library. If there is such a Prince, then he would be too recluse."

"Vernoux-dono, would you mind not interrupting?"

Vernoux, who tried to help me, attracted Clive's attention. No, it seemed like he was making fun of Clive rather than helping me. Vernoux might have been feigning even though he looked like he was having a little fun... either way, this has definitely offended Clive.

"I never told you that you could call me Clay. I only said that to Sylvester-sama."

"You're so hard-headed. You don't have to worry about that because I call you Clay first, right? His Highness never calls you Clay, does he?"

“Sylvester-sama just doesn’t call me that in front of other people.”

I smiled wryly inside at those misleading words. I was considerate towards him because he seemed like he hated being called 『Clay』 by Vernoux.

“Eh, so you actually like it?”

“I don’t.”

“So you’re saying that you want His Highness to call you a name that you don’t like? That’s not right, is it? You’re shy.”

“Vernoux. Stop.”

Clive would resent him if Vernoux said any more than this, so I stopped him, and he shrugged. Ah, he was going to stop even if I hadn’t stopped him. However, Vernoux probably won’t stop calling him Clay, so Clive should probably just give up.

Clive gave a long sigh.

“If you keep hiding your appearances too much, then we’ll have to ask the rumoured girl to fortune-tell where Sylvester-sama is.”

Vernoux tilted his head at those words.

“It’s surprising. Do you believe in dream fortune-telling, Clay?”

“Of course it’s a joke. But, I don’t know who’s doing it, so I would like to ask you not to force me to do something unknown.”

“Aside from believing it or not, that’s a dreadful way of putting it. Even if she’s called the Saint, she only does silly fortunes like telling the weather and looking for lost items, right? It’s not like fortune-tellers are rare, so you don’t have to protest.”

“You’re too careless. Anyway, why do you know so much about the Saint?”

Clive glared at Vernoux lightly. However, Vernoux didn’t flinch.

“Well, of course, I’ve heard rumours about her. It’s not like... they’re making a new religion. She’s just a child. There are people who actually think she’s helped them. Look, aside from it working or not, it’s like effective medicine to people who believe.”

Vernoux checked up everything about her because the 『Dreamer Girl』 has been the topic of many rumours lately.

It’s not good to go out to town without knowing about things taking place in the world. However, there isn’t any bad or dangerous information at the moment, most of the information was about the fortune-teller whose predictions are spot-on. In the first place, I think the castle would investigate if there were suspicious people, so there was nothing to worry about if that wasn’t taking place. Like Vernoux said, she wasn’t just a fortune-teller. It seems like she does this because she likes making people happy.

However, even though he checked up on her, he hadn't met her directly. He said that he had watched her from afar, but it could have a negative impact on his stealth if he approached her. But, he might not be interested in her enough to want to meet her.

"I don't think any suspicious people would approach His Highness any time soon."

"I'm worried that they would approach him."

"Why are you suspicious of me? I'm not acquainted with the dreamer girl."

Clive raised his eyebrow at Vernoux who lightly protested.

"I'm not just talking about her. I'm telling you not to introduce girls whose intentions are unknown to Sylvester-sama. Are you saying you have no idea who I'm talking about?"

"Yeah, not at all."

Vernoux replied nonchalantly, but I knew that Clive was talking about Dilly.

I told Clive that I have never met her before, but his doubts still haven't been cleared. Clive's father, Marquis Eames, doesn't seem to think much of Earl Pameradia, Dilly's father, so it can't be helped... but he hasn't met her at all, so I didn't have to worry about his concern. And every time he gets suspicious, I smile silently as if I have nothing to say... Perhaps my response made him more suspicious?

"You worry too much, Clay. Even if a suspicious lady approaches His Highness, she can't deceive His Majesty. Don't worry."

"I'm worried because you, a cunning person, is by his side."

"If you're that worried, then you best keep watch so that you won't be outwitted. That's also better for me since you doubt me."

Vernoux, who replied provocatively, firmly appealed his innocence. I would be troubled if he reinforces his monitoring, but this is Vernoux, so this is surely his way of masquerading my absence. Vernoux shook his head and escaped from Clive's glare.

"But I didn't think you would talk about the dreamer girl, Clay. The ladies talk about her a lot."

He was probably referring to Dilly talking about the dreamer girl the other day.

"Ladies might talk about the dreamer girl at tea parties."

I suddenly thought as I hummed along. Dilly said that Lady Hazel had told her about the dreamer girl, but is she curious about the girl because she had brought her up? Dilly doesn't seem interested in fortune-tellers, so she might have been collecting information for tea parties... did she perhaps want to get her fortune done? It didn't look like she did, but it's bothering me now.

How do I put it? It doesn't seem like Dilly. Of course, I know that Dilly acts beyond what I expect of a lady.

"... In any case, I hope you don't go out to meet the dreamer girl out of curiosity."

Clay let out a deep sigh and said. He probably thought he wasn't making any progress. However, Vernoux reacted to him straight away.

"There's no way he'd do that. If he really wants to see her, then he could just call her to the castle."

"Well, I won't do that."

"See, His Highness said it. Are you relieved?"

"..."

Clay's eyes, as he looked at Vernoux, said that he's really suspicious. However, this conversation was over because he couldn't catch me sneaking out of the castle.

"Then, I'll come back later."

Clay said and left. I turned to Vernoux and asked.

"You know... can you two get along?"

"Okay. But that wasn't my fault."

"I don't think it's Clay's fault either."

Vernoux shrugged and stood up with a kick of his legs.

"Well, it's not like you can freely choose what the dreamer girl predicts. It's like people are exaggerating to console themselves."

"That's right."

"However, that's just for now. I don't know what will happen in the future, she might really be the second coming of the Saint, like the rumours say she is. But I'll say one thing. It doesn't seem like Clay would really go into town to ask her about where you are."

He said jokingly, and I smiled wryly.

"But isn't it rather hard on her too? I hope she can live in peace."

It's someone else's affair, but it must be rather hard to live without concealing a unique power.

"Yeah. She's just an orphan, but she's being protected by the church, so it should be fine. They stopped her from fortune-telling, but she's a child, so she does it behind their backs. I'm sure she's happy that people compliment her."

We're children, and I found it strange that Vernoux was talking like an adult. I laughed a little.

"Do you want your fortune told?"

"Nope... I feel like Dilly would do unexpected things even if her fortune is told. No matter how correct the fortunes are, I can't imagine them being correct."

"Haha, that's right."

Of course, if it can trigger something, then I think it's very reliable. But, it's not something I want to rely on right now.

However... what Vernoux said a while ago, 『If he really wants to see her, then he could just call her to the castle』 is prickling me. Dilly doesn't come no matter how much I invite her.

Of course, she would come if I ordered her to, but she hates it, so my popularity with her will fall. In the end, I can't summon her.

... But, I wonder if I should mention it lightly to the Earl.

My expectations have been crushed every time, but the best chance I have to meet her as 『Sylvester』 is probably through Elvis. No, getting him to let me meet Dilly might be the hardest thing to do, but I have no other methods.

“She seemed interested in father's reign, but there still isn't much I can do in public... So, this is my chance.”

“What's wrong?”

“No, it's nothing.”

This isn't something to praise, but I'll do my best to get Dilly a little interested in 『Sylvester』 through the mobile library project. I am hated, but I was taught a scheme on how to recover. It should be a good chance.

Of course, I'm planning on making an effort even without those evil thoughts, but I want her to understand that I have those expectations and that I would be nervous.

Instead, I'm going to do my best to get a better result.

Act 43: A Calm and Bustling Spring

One day in the spring of Cordelia's 14th year.

Cordelia was entertaining her childhood friend, Vernoux in the warm flowery garden.

"Your house has a lot of flowers like always."

"They're beautiful, aren't they?"

"Well, it seems like a scene that women would like."

The topic of flowers was brought up, but Vernoux still didn't seem interested in flowers and was stabbing his cake with a fork. As usual, he preferred sweets over flowers.

Today's sweet was a rare springy cheesecake made with checkerboard layers of strawberries and pistachios.

"Then, I'll report it before I forget. I was contacted yesterday, and they told me that they can obtain all the books I requested for the mobile library next month."

"That's good. You can get that light illustration picture book that seemed difficult to obtain, right?"

"Yeah. I asked for some books personally when I placed the order, and they promised that they could get them, so I don't need to worry."

"Some, you say... How many books did you order, Dilly?"

"Oh, it's still within the range of my allowance."

"Just how much is this 『allowance』?"

Vernoux shrugged. Cordelia's allowance was from the profit she made with trades, and she'd purchased books on cultivation methods and medicine plants, which were necessary for her research.

Three months have already passed since they had started the book loaning plan for the villages around the royal capital, commonly known as the 『Mobile Library』, together with the noble children.

Cordelia's father, Elvis, set up their head office and consulted with them about speciality products, and they consulted with Vernoux's father, Marquis Flantheim, about which types of books to loan. Both of them made additional proposals, but they didn't reject the children's recommendations, and the project advanced roughly how Cordelia and Vernoux had planned.

The reason why the project wasn't rejected was that the planners of the mobile library plan, had a review meeting in advance. They had the villages listen to what books would be selected and got opinions from librarians who would be employed as the book managers and shopkeepers of rental bookstores.

Incidentally, Vernoux is the chairman of the review meetings.

Vernoux wanted to leave it to Cordelia, but she insisted that it would be easier for him to make the call. The review meeting wasn't made up of all the donors; it only consisted of enthusiastic people, including those who got along with Vernoux, like Myles and Clifton, and Hazel, who Vernoux wasn't

good at dealing with. Hazel had been very serious and had made firm remarks during the meeting, but she had been assertive, and it had made Vernoux run away immediately after the meeting had ended.

“They found bad roads that need paving on the route, and there was an accident, but it’s generally going well. It was worthwhile to plan.”

“Yes.”

“By the way Dilly, I’m curious about something... what’s that in the middle of the table?”

Vernoux had changed his tone and glanced sharply at a transparent bottle on the middle of the table. The bottle contained small cubes wrapped in thin paper and was also put there for decoration.

“Would you like some?”

“What? They’re sweets? Are they good?”

“I like them.”

Cordelia stood up, picked up the bottle, walked up to Vernoux and opened it in front of him.

“Have one.”

“It’s wrapped in really thin paper. It’s stuck pretty tight and hard to peel off.”

Cordelia laughed slowly at Vernoux, who was calmly looking at the sweet in his hand.

“No, you don’t need to peel it off. It melts in your mouth.”

“What?”

“That paper melts. You can eat it as it is.”

Cordelia said as she took a sweet and threw it straight into her mouth. Vernoux stared at her in shock.

She knew why he was looking at her like that. To put it simply, “I can’t believe you’re eating paper. What’re you thinking!?” It wouldn’t be strange if he said, “You’re not a goat,” either. Vernoux didn’t know that this paper was edible oblaat.

“Try one.”

Vernoux didn’t look convinced, but he still put one in his mouth as he frowned. Then, after a while he tilted his head in confusion. The oblaat had melted.

“See? The paper melted, didn’t it?”

“... It doesn’t harm your body?”

“Of course not. I can’t tell you the details, but Otou-sama has already tasted it.”

“... You thought of making something strange again.”

He looked shocked as he threw the second one into his mouth.

“It’s sweeter than I thought, but the melting sensation of this paper is quite interesting. You don’t have to worry about the sweets sticking together if it’s wrapped in paper, and it’s easy to eat too. It seems very convenient.”

Probably because it was an original idea, Vernoux seemed more interested in the oblaat than the sweets themselves.

“But... it’s a pretty interesting concept, did you open your eyes to sweets after baking? I don’t think it’s important for lady training, but I guess you made this for sweets too.”

“I can definitely unveil this sweet thanks to the oblaat, but I hope that it can eventually be used in the medical field.”

“This is oblaat...? It looks completely different from the ones I know.”

Like Vernoux said, the oblaat of this world are like rice crackers... Because it’s the so-called hard oblaat, it’s shaped differently from the paper-like soft oblaat. That was why Cordelia decided to try and develop it.

“It’s still in the middle of development. I want to make it a little thinner.”

Then, people who have a hard time taking medicine, including Hans, will be happy. Cordelia was enthusiastic, and Vernoux looked worried.

“Say, Dilly. I have a suggestion. Why don’t you submit this in the competition show?”

“Competition show?”

“Yeah. Gille mentioned it before. It’s an academic festival hosted by the royal family.”

The competition show is an exhibition in which participants bring and present the products they have developed. There are no restrictions on the products being submitted, but since it’s sponsored by the royal family, the preliminaries are quite strict. However, if the product catches the eyes of the judges, then that developer is given a research grant, and most importantly, they can advertise that their product has been recognised by the royal family at the time of sale.

However, since the product is subsidised based on the premise that it will lead to public interest, the price and distribution will be interfered to a certain extent.

“Dilly, you aren’t willing to publicise how essential oils are refined, right? So, I don’t think it’s possible to submit that, but if you’re going to spread this in the medical field, then it’s a good opportunity, right?”

“... You’re right. I want a lot of people to use it.”

When Vernoux heard Cordelia’s answer, he continued.

“You need to submit materials about the manufacturing process if you’re going to enter the competition show, but they won’t be released without permission, and royalties will be paid even if they’re used. What do you think?”

“Somehow, today’s Vernoux is kind of like a merchant.”

“Don’t evade the question.”

“I’m not. But I can’t make the decision alone, I have to discuss this with Otou-sama.”

Cordelia shrugged because she couldn’t exhibit it on her own accord and Vernoux gave a long sigh.

(Why is he sighing here?)

Is he not convinced? I don’t think he would answer honestly if I ask him about it. Cordelia closed the lid and returned to her own seat. Cordelia had brought up oblaat, but she had left the development to Ronnie. He had fun making them, but she should probably ask him about it too.

“Dilly, have you forgotten the other good thing that happens when you participate in the competition show?”

“What is it?”

“This also depends on the result, but you will be given a permit to enter the Big Bookcase.”

The Big Bookcase is a vast library owned by the royal family and is said to have the most extensive book collection in the kingdom. The Pameradia’s library is impressive, but the size was clearly different from that of the royal family.

“Isn’t it fine to give it a go? I’m sure it’ll go well with this.”

“Really?”

If so, then she should find out more about the competition and get permission from Elvis if there aren’t any problems. She was also very interested in the treasure house of knowledge.

However, there was a problem with the Big Bookcase that worried her.

That was the location.

She would have to go to the castle where the Prince who she was trying to avoid with all her might resides.

(But even if I get the permit, I would be going to a place where ordinary people can visit, so I probably won’t encounter any royals... right?)

Of course, they check people’s backgrounds when the permit is issued, but there’s no need for them to let outsiders near the royal family. It’s reasonable to think that we would pass one another in typical situations.

However, when Cordelia thought up until there, she met eyes with Vernoux, who looked strangely like he was having fun and frowned.

“Vernoux-sama, that expression... What are you up to?”

“No, nothing?”

“It doesn’t look like you’re telling the truth.”

Vernoux-sama acted as if nothing was up, but if he always had a wicked expression like this, then he wouldn't have been mistaken for a prince at Oulu Village.

Cordelia, who remembered that, almost said it out loud, and quickly coughed.

“What was that just now?”

“Nothing. Don't worry about it.”

“Well, fine. If you get the permit, then you'll come to the castle a lot, right?”

“... In any case, nothing will happen if I don't get permission from Otou-sama.”

For example, I couldn't agree straight away because I am still hesitant to enter the castle. However, as I thought earlier, I don't have to worry about it that much. I'm sure it'll be fine.

“That's true. Well, I'm looking forward to it. By the way, can you give me the sweet and bottle from before?”

“Oh my, do you want to take it home with you? Okay.”

“Then, I won't hold back. It'll be easy to eat this even if I take it home with me.”

I don't remember Vernoux-sama ever holding back, but I'm sure the Flantheim House still doesn't have any sweets. It's okay if he's happy.

“Sweets things are important for taking away fatigue from studying.”

“Yeah. Oh yes, are you going to bake again anytime soon, Dilly? Gille is looking forward to it.”

“I'll make something in the future. Didn't I give you two muffins last month?”

This is definitely just Vernoux-sama demanding sweets. And he still has that wicked look on his face which makes me want to ask what he's thinking.

(... Well, there's no use worrying about it, this is Vernoux-sama after all.)

Cordelia moved on and saw Vernoux off. Then, she dreamed of entering the Big Bookcase and got hyped up, “Alright!”

Everything will be after she gets permission.

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Three days after Vernoux's proposal, Cordelia asked Ronnie who was enjoying tea in the greenhouse like always.

“Say, Ronnie. What would you think if I told you that I wanted to present oblaat at the competition show?”

When she had asked Elvis about participating in the competition, he had only given her one condition. “I don't mind if you want to release it to the public,” so it would be no problem if she got permission from Ronnie. She thought she should have asked Ronnie first, but she could see him saying, “Why don't you ask Master first?”

Ronnie has almost been working on the oblaat alone after she had proposed the idea. At first, he would question her, “What is it supposed to be?” and “How do you make it?” But a few days later, he said, “It’s probably going well,” and worked silently alone. Even if she tried to help him, he would brush her off, “It’s going well right now, so leave it for later.” If you ask Cordelia, then she did arrange for water plants that could be used as a substitute from books Fulvia had... But that was about it.

Ronnie wasn’t trying to keep his research a secret. He gave her progress reports, “Please look at this,” showed her the product many times, and answered any questions that she had. Cordelia had also made it with the process that Ronnie had shown her.

“The competition show? You’re going to submit it?”

“Of course, if you’re alright with it.”

Ronnie put down the cup, and asked Cordelia strangely.

“Have you asked Master? I’m fine with it if you are. I think you just need to submit documents and the product, so it won’t be much trouble.”

Ronnie, who didn’t seem to care either way, said, “I think if you copy this, then you’ll be able to make the document straight away,” and took his own record off the bookshelf.

“Oh, but there is something. Can you make it so you made this yourself, Ojou-sama? In the worst case, replace my name with mentor’s.”

“... I don’t think that’s a good idea since it’s false.”

Cordelia tilted her head wondering what he was saying all of a sudden.

“... I thought so. Then, how about putting you as the lead and me as support?”

“Why don’t you want your name to come out? The oblaat could be made because you did your best.”

She certainly wanted the permit to enter the Big Bookcase, but Ronnie was the main researcher. So, that was what she was going to write, but Ronnie gave a long sigh.

“I don’t want people to say annoying things. I know you’re not going to do that, but if you put me as the main researcher, then I might stand out weirdly as if I’m using you.”

“Oh, some might think like that...”

“There are people who will think that. I don’t really like standing out. And if you’re going to spread this product after it’s completed, then your name would be more convenient. People trust the Pameradia name more than mine, and you’ll see less resistance even if it’s a new product.”

Cordelia couldn’t help but accept what Ronnie had said.

(It’s possible that from an outsider’s perspective, Ronnie looks as if he is researching freely by manipulating a noble child.)

I understand Ronnie’s concerns, but I can’t agree with him.

“I understand your point, but it feels like I’ve stolen your credit.”

“That’s not a problem. I don’t think it’s being stolen.”

“That’s just like you... you’re frank.”

“I don’t want to stand out because I want to relax while doing what I love. The planner’s name is written first so, formally, there’s no problems, right?”

Cordelia shrugged at Ronnie who thought about how not to stand out with a serious look.

“Is it really alright?”

“Yes. Don’t forget that I couldn’t have made this if you hadn’t suggested it.”

She was thankful that she got permission, but she thought it was a waste. *Isn’t it alright for him to be a little greedier?*

“Oh, instead, I’ll accept paid holiday and extra income. That’s necessary for relaxing.”

“I know, so I’ll think about it. You can take a day off whenever you want.”

“Yay!”

Cordelia smiled wryly when she looked at the happy Ronnie.

(After the competition, I’ll get him to take enough days off so that he can even travel.)

Thus, Cordelia’s exhibition for the competition show was decided.

However, that didn’t mean that her work increased because her exhibition had been decided. The oblaat that Ronnie had said was the limit for now was thinner than the one she had given to Vernoux as sweets, and he said that he would arrange the documents for her. Cordelia had offered to do the documents, but Ronnie turned her down because it was an opportunity to teach Lara how to write.

Lara, the apprentice servant, had successfully graduated from apprentice, and was working splendidly as a full-fledged servant. Her popularity with the senior servants is also great.

(... But I wanted to do it.)

Cordelia didn’t mind if it was after Lara, so she decided to ask him to teach her how to write the documents.

Act 44: Future Knight's Prelude

As preparations progressed for the exhibition, Cordelia visited Earl Hale's mansion, where her friend Hazel resided. Because Hazel had sent her a letter inviting her over, "The flowers in the garden are blooming beautifully, so I would like you to enjoy them too." Like the Pameradia House, the Hale House also welcomed the season of beautiful flowers.

Various flowers were also drawn on the card that was attached to the invitation, and Cordelia visited the Hale mansion with high expectations.

The garden, which she saw, was filled with a wider variety of flowers than she'd imagined, and it was gorgeous. *Spring is a really calm and beautiful season*, she thought as she asked someone to convey a message to Hazel, at the entrance, and then she heard a large quarrel as if it was trying to spoil her mood.

"Dahlia! Wait! You haven't finished your studies, have you?!"

"I'm going to be a knight! I can't be late for sword practice!"

Cordelia looked up at the surprising interaction and saw Hazel and another girl appear on the second floor. Hazel grabbed the girl's arm, but the other girl was stronger, so she shook off Hazel's hand in no time. Cordelia widened her eyes.

(I wonder if that's Hazel-sama's sister.)

The Hale House has Hazel as their eldest child and four other children.

Cordelia had only spoken to the small heir, their eldest son, but Hazel often boasted that they are all cute. *I wonder if one of them is the person she's quarrelling with right now*, she wondered, and the girl jumped from the railing.

"Huh?!"



Cordelia's voice instinctively leaked out, and Hazel shouted at almost the same time, "Stewart!" In response to Hazel's voice, the servant, who was receiving Cordelia, quickly moved and caught the falling girl.

"That's dangerous, Dahlia Ojou-sama."

"Stewart! Stop getting in my way all the time!"

But even if the girl named Dahlia shouted, the servant named Stewart didn't move. Meanwhile, Hazel walked down the stairs in a grand manner. Her back seemed to be clad in a dark aura.

"Fufufu, you can't escape even if you try. At least, you won't be allowed to leave the house today unless you finish today's schedule!"

"But I'll be late for practice! Didn't Okaa-sama say it was fine as long as I come back!"

"Okaa-sama is too soft! The things you are doing now, I'd already finished when I was 10!"

Cordelia was flabbergasted as she watched the violent exchange, but soon, Stewart deliberately cleared his throat.

"Ojou-sama, there's a guest."

The two girls hadn't noticed that there was a guest until he had said that.

"How do you do, Hazel-sama? And little sister-sama."

"Oh my, Cordelia-sama! Pardon me, welcome. Ah, this is my stupid sister, Dahlia Will Hale. She's 12."

Unlike Hazel, who had a smile on her face like nothing significant had happened, Dahlia had an extremely uncomfortable expression.

"Nice to meet you, Dahlia-sama."

"... Nice to meet you."

Dahlia answered while averting her gaze, and it was clear that she hadn't wanted anyone to see the previous scene. Hazel, on the other hand, felt as if she'd received unexpected reinforcements and was overjoyed, she didn't have a bit of shyness or any reserve.

"Now, come back, Dahlia. This all started because you won't study properly."

However, Dahlia snapped at Hazel.

"Because today is my sword practice day which is more important than lectures! I'm going to be a knight!"

Dahlia declared, folded her arms and turned away.

Cordelia was surprised. This was her first time meeting a girl who wanted to become a female knight.

"Hmm... Do you want to become a knight, Dahlia-sama?"

"Yes. What's wrong with that?"

Dahlia, who was in a bad mood, wasn't friendly to Cordelia even though this was their first meeting, and Cordelia smiled wryly. However, her attitude made Hazel raise her voice as if her hair was standing up.

"Dahlia, that was rude! This is Cordelia-sama, the daughter of the famous knight family, the Pameradia's, whom you admire!"

"... Eh, the Pameradia's?!"

Dahlia instantly brightened up when she heard that. She approached Cordelia and took her hands.

"Cordelia-sama, please speak to Onee-sama. She's trying to obstruct me from practising the sword!"

"Huh...?"

"I admire the Queen and the knights who guard her. Therefore, I also want to become a knight and enter the Imperial Guards someday, so I have to improve my sword skills. Even so, Onee-sama keeps nagging me about studying..."

"You'll be the one who's troubled, since you can't become a knight if you're dumb!"

"It'll work out somehow if I'm skilful with the sword!"

Seeing them fight, Cordelia was able to understand what was happening. Dahlia was a young lady who didn't like studying very much and wanted to become a knight.

(And... Dahlia-sama also seems reckless.)

It was a bold remark since one wouldn't imagine that from her image if she didn't open her mouth.

(... No, I can tell that she's energetic since she jumped down from the second floor.)

For the time being, I should meditate between the fighting sisters.

"Dahlia-sama, my brothers are excellent at martial arts, but they also have a variety of knowledge. I've been taught a lot of things from them, and I think having a lot of knowledge would be useful for your work."

"..."

Dahlia was full of energy as if she had gained an ally, but her expression rapidly changed.

"See. Studying is also important."

"Of course, I think it's better to be able to study rather than not, but..."

Even with this she's still not convinced. What should I do? Cordelia thought a little.

From her reaction, I understand that she also thinks that studying is necessary. However, does she believe things will work out somehow with the way things are now, or is she more fascinated with sword practice...?

She couldn't come up with an answer even if she thought about it, so she gave Dahlia a proposal.

"Dahlia-sama. If you don't mind, would you like to come to my house?"

“Huh?”

“We might have things that will be interesting to you.”

“Is that alright?”

“Yes. Hazel-sama always invites me over.”

Dahlia’s eyes sparkled when she heard what Cordelia had said. *I don’t know the cause yet, but if I can get her motivated to study, then these two sisters might not have a reason to argue anymore, and Dahlia-sama is this happy about it, so she might be able to get something just by seeing our possessions.*

“I would like to go there straight away!”

“Today is a bit... Dahlia-sama, you also have practice, don’t you?”

“Y-yes...”

Dahlia was taken aback and dropped her gaze to the floor in disappointment. She wanted to go to the Pameradia mansion straight away.

“Cordelia-sama, we can’t bother you. This child is simple, she heads straight into things that she’s interested in, so I’m sure she’ll bother you.”

(She’s just like Hazel-sama.)

Cordelia smiled wryly inside at Hazel, who had spoken when Dahlia went quiet.

She held it down, smiled at Hazel and turned to Dahlia.

“Hmm. If you give me a few days, then I can discuss this with my Onii-samas, and prepare items that you can enjoy. However, since this invitation shouldn’t interfere with your studies, please study so that your parents and Hazel-sama will let you go cheerfully.”

“Ye... s.”

It was a slightly stiff reply, but Dahlia still replied without hesitation. She seemed pleased, and her expression said, “Make Hazel promise!”

“Dahlia, if you understand Cordelia-sama’s words, then you can go today. But keep that in mind when you get back, alright?”

Hazel put her hands together and smiled superbly, and Dahlia replied reluctantly. Then, Dahlia curtsied to Cordelia and left.

“I’m sorry about that. This way, Cordelia-sama. I’ve troubled you.”

“It’s okay. It was a new experience since I’ve never met a girl who wanted to be a knight before.”

“Dahlia has good reflexes, but she isn’t good at studying, so she quickly dozes off.”

Hah, Hazel sighed and put a hand to her forehead.

“You’re worried about her, aren’t you?”

“She’s my cute little sister, and I hope her dream will come true. But as things are, she would definitely fail the written exam before she can show her skills. Even if I tell her that academic ability is necessary to stay by the Queen’s side, father and mother don’t say anything, so she won’t believe me.”

(Hazel-sama is right, but maybe all she says to Dahlia-sama is study, study, study.)

I remember their fight, and it seemed like Dahlia-sama feels that Hazel-sama’s words are a disturbance. If someone else said something, then she might understand... Cordelia thought as she continued to listen to Hazel.

“Neither father nor mother is against her becoming a knight. However, they’re also not supporting her. As I thought, they’re worried about her.”

“About her swinging a sword?”

“Yes. And it’s a rare occupation. I think they would honestly feel relieved if she failed the exam because she hadn’t studied enough. But they also want her to study a little more.”

“... In that case, was my invitation unwelcomed?”

Hazel looked slightly mixed, and Cordelia put a hand to her mouth and thought. *Even if they don’t oppose, it might not be good to differ from their education policy.*

But Hazel slowly shook her head.

“Even if you hadn’t invited her, she won’t change her mind about being a knight. And it’s pitiful if she doesn’t get motivation once in a while. Of course I’m worried, but she’ll regret it if she doesn’t do what she wants, right?”

“You’re a wonderful older sister.”

“Stop it.”

Cordelia laughed a little at Hazel, who had turned a little red.

Hazel said again, “Please stop!” before sighing.

“... I think she’ll be motivated if she sees something different than what she’s used to. As her older sister, I’m happy that you’ll show her a world different from the one she knows.”

“Then, I’ll have to make sure she has fun.”

“I’m sorry for troubling you. She’s a really good girl... but she just can’t study. I think it’s disappointing and unbearable.”

Hah... Hazel sighed once again. *She’s really considerate towards her younger sister. Hopefully, she can convey a little of those feelings...* Cordelia thought, and, next to her, Hazel complained, “She really doesn’t think of anything else except for what’s in front of her...!” *It seems like it would be difficult.* Cordelia smiled wryly.

After that, they chatted, had tea, enjoyed the garden and Cordelia headed home.

On the way home, Cordelia thought of ways to entertain Dahlia, but unfortunately, she couldn't think of anything by the time she arrived home.

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She arrived home before she could come up with an idea, but she still had a few days before Dahlia would come over.

(I don't have to rush; I can take my time to think.)

Cordelia got off the carriage and headed straight to the entrance. She saw an uncommon sight of her two brothers talking at the entrance, and she blinked.

(Cyrus-oniisama and Isma-oniisama?)

Cordelia tilted her head in confusion, since she had only seen them together a handful of times. *Oh my, do they have a special engagement today?*

"But, brother, that's-..."

"I've been thinking about it for a long time. I've already made the request, and father knows about it."

I don't know what they're talking about, but I don't want to disturb them if it's something important. But if I don't walk through here, then I can't go back to my room. What should I do? Cordelia thought, *but they probably wouldn't stand here and talk if it's important.* She kept on walking.

"I'm home, Onii-samas."

If I'm disturbing them, then I can just keep on walking... Cordelia greeted, and Cyrus and Isma turned around at the same time. Her two brothers were handsome today, even though they both wore different trends... The aura around them became more brilliant when they were together.



“Welcome home, Cordelia.”

Her second brother, Isma, replied first in a soft voice. The eldest brother, Cyrus, on the other hand, was silent, but he looked like he was troubled and looking for something to say, since Isma had stolen his words. In any case, it didn't seem like they were having a secret conversation.

“It's rare for you two to be together.”

She was hesitant to ask them what they were talking about, but she still spoke honestly. Isma smiled.

“Brother returned because of business, but he's going back to the castle now. I'll be staying here tonight.”

“I see.”

“... Yeah. Isma, I'll leave the rest to you.”

“Yes, be careful.”

Cyrus lightly patted Cordelia's head as he passed her and left. They had already finished their conversation.

“So, where did you go today? Did you go to Marquis Flantheim's mansion?”

“No, I was invited to visit Earl Hale's mansion today by Hazel-sama.”

“Oh, so you have a young lady friend who is the same age as you.”

“Yes. Onii-sama, there's actually something I would like to talk to you about... Would you listen to my request?”

“Request?”

Cordelia nodded at Isma, who had tilted his head slightly.

“Hazel-sama has a little sister named Dahlia who is aiming to be a knight. I invited her over next time, and I wondered if I could show her anything to make her happy. So, I would like to talk to you about this.”

Cordelia said, and Isma crossed his arms and hummed a little.

“Well, Earl Hale's family usually do jobs that involve languages, and you don't hear many of them becoming knights, so I think most people would be happy about this... There are a lot of interesting things in the basement treasure room.”

“Interesting things?”

“For example, the outfits of Beatrice-sama, the younger sister of the former head four generations ago. There are also items from victory parades, so I think she'll find them interesting. There are also a lot of other things, so let's go see them together.”

“Thank you very much. I'm glad I talked to you about this, Onii-sama.”

If that's the case, then I'm sure Dahlia-sama will be happy. She must know about Beatrice-sama, the Black Princess General, who galloped through the battlefields.

As expected of Onii-sama, he gave me wonderful choices... she thought, I feel bad if I stopped their conversation. Even if they've finished their discussion, they probably had other things they wanted to talk about.

"What's wrong? Are you worried about something else?"

"It's rare for you two to be together, and I thought I came home at a bad time..."

"Oh, it's not like brother has much time, and we sometimes meet during work. It's not like we don't meet as often as you think we do, Cordelia."

Indeed, if Cyrus-oniisama is in the middle of work, then he wouldn't have much time to talk like Isma-oniisama said. Isma also patted Cordelia's head lightly like Cyrus had before.

"It's rare for you to say that you want to invite a friend over."

"Huh? Is... that so?"

Vernoux and Hazel come over even if she doesn't invite them, and Fulvia comes over as her teacher. She didn't recall ever inviting friends over, even if they invite her over.

"If necessary, I can provide commentary if you invite her over on my day off?"

"Huh? Is that alright?"

"Of course."

Cordelia, who hadn't anticipated such an offer, couldn't understand what Isma was saying as he stood in front of her smiling. However, it was sudden, but she couldn't ask what he meant if he was concealing it.

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A few days later, a little before the sun rose to the top.

In the parlour at the Pameradia mansion, Dahlia's eyes sparkled at the number of items in front of her.

"I can't believe it... Those there... Those there are such wonderful things!! I can't believe that the items that Beatrice-sama loved exist!!"

To the excited Dahlia, Isma, an active knight, smiled wryly as he explained.

"You may already know this, judging by how you're acting, Dahlia-sama, but Beatrice-sama, the owner of this outfit, was very brave. She played an active role in the war against the north, and a lot of heroic stories are written about her in history books."

“Yes, yes! I searched her up! She didn’t surface at all after the war and was called the Goddess of War, the Black Princess General. Oh... I can’t believe that the symbol of Beatrice-sama, this black jacket, exists...!! The stone on this chest piece is also very rare.”

“That’s her reward from the Battle of Talpa Fortress.”

“Oh my, from that time?!”

Dahlia, who was looking at the items with her hands folded while listening to Isma’s commentary, became increasingly excited.

Cordelia watched on from a close distance.

(She even knows about that niche battle.)

Cordelia also learnt about Beatrice because she was a part of her family, but she didn’t remember what she had learnt in that much detail. The Battle of Talpa Fortress was also an important battle, but there was another critical historical battle on at the same time which had more impact, so the Battle of Talpa Fortress might be omitted from some textbooks.

However, Dahlia was saying it like it was normal. Her figure looked like she was having a lot of fun as if she was dreaming... and looked like Hazel, who was talking to an imaginary Vernoux in the past. Her feelings were different from Dahlia’s, but the way they expressed their feelings were the same.

“Beatrice-sama is someone who has left a lot of stories, I’m sure she was burdened with expectations by those around her from a young age... She had a strong will that doesn’t lose to pressure. She’s so wonderful. I’m in a completely different situation, but I want to have a strong will like Beatrice-sama.”

Dahlia’s words made Cordelia feel something indescribable.

She didn’t object Dahlia’s words of a 『strong will』. Cordelia also thought the same when she entered the treasure room with Isma the other day that was until she found a diary written by Beatrice.

However, she had found things in the diary that stated that the people around Beatrice hadn’t had any expectations of her. 『People say that I’m a tomboy, a wild horse and that I do what I like. If that’s the case, maybe I should show them what wild is.』 『I held it in and wore a dress, but they scolded me, saying that heels aren’t weapons. Even though things that can be thrown are weapons.』

(It wasn’t that people expected things from her, but rather she was someone who persevered even though she was opposed.)

If she thought about it carefully, there are no other records of young ladies wielding swords, much less stand in the front line, even within the Pameradia House, which produces many knights. In that sense, it might be close to Dahlia’s situation.

(I also respect strong wills, but I don’t think I need to tell that to Dahlia-sama.)

Dahlia might be delighted to learn of the existence of a diary that no one knew about. But Beatrice already seemed like the ideal existence to Dahlia, so there was a possibility that this image would be destroyed.

(And Beatrice-sama probably didn't expect anyone to read her diary in the future.)

I'm not sure if I should say this as someone who has read it, but it's horrible to think that someone would read my diary. Diaries aren't written so that they can be read by others... She thought, and Dahlia spoke cutely again.

"Oh my, this is a nice protection pouch. Is it Beatrice-sama's? These days, you put birthstones and War God carvings at the top of pendants for luck. I wonder if I should make one."

"Dalia-jou, you really like knights, don't you? Nowadays, not many people have protection pouches, some knights don't even know about their existence."

Isma was impressed, and Cordelia generally agreed with his opinion. *She must really admire strong knights.*

(But if she likes history this much and has a good memory, then she didn't have to jump down from the second floor to run away from her lessons.)

She had lured Dahlia to study hard, but at the very least, it didn't seem like Dahlia hated learning in general. Cordelia wondered what the fundamental problem was, and once again spoke brightly, "Kyaa," and shifted her eyes onto the next item. In response to her voice, Isma began a new explanation. He paused for a moment and had an amused smile on his face.

"Onii-sama. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I think that Dahlia-jou is similar to Cordelia."

"To me?"

"Yeah. I feel like you were acting like this the first time we went to the forest."

Isma said nostalgically and pleasantly, but Cordelia didn't know how to respond. *Did I act like this? I remember being happy, but I didn't mean to show my emotions on my face like that... But it might seem to the same to Onii-sama.*

(No, this... I appreciate it if I looked this charming.)

However, I was a little older than Isma-oniisama in my previous world since I was twenty, so I would feel a bit embarrassed if I looked like Dahlia-sama does right now.

"Isma-sama, don't tell me this item is...?"

"Yeah, that hair ornament is probably..."

Anyway, I think it's okay if Dahlia-sama is happy... When she thought that, she heard a light knock at the door. Cordelia quietly opened the door so that she wouldn't disturb the engrossed Dahlia, and Emina appeared.

"Excuse me. Would you like to have lunch? Lunch is ready to be served at any time."

"Oh my, is it already that time?"

She hadn't noticed time passing at all because she was overwhelmed by Dahlia's enthusiasm. Isma guessed what Cordelia and Emina were talking about.

"Then, let's go have lunch soon."

"Ah, mm, erm, a little more... Please let me look at these items for a little longer!"

Dahlia begged and stared at a sword at Isma's invitation. *I guess she's captivated by the items. Even though lunch has been set, they should still need a little more time to prepare, so it should be fine.* Isma also thought the same.

"Why do you want to become a knight, Dahlia-jou?"

"I fell in love with them at first sight."

"Love at first sight?"

"Yes."

Dahlia smiled at the brother and sister, who spoke at the same time.

"My mother admires the Queen a lot, and she has a postcard of the Queen in a palanquin, but the women depicted on that postcard looked cool. They were more charming than the women I saw in picture books before. Then, I researched, and my admiration for them became stronger."

With her hands on both cheeks, she continued happily.

"Of course, there's a difference between my admiration and reality. When I first started learning the sword, I was surprised by the weight. And I learnt that swords weren't elegant items, but weapons. But I definitely want to be recognised for my sword skills and be useful. I will be."

Her looking like she's full of confidence is probably not my imagination. Hazel-sama also said that Dahlia-sama's reflexes are good. Isma smiled wryly and spoke, perhaps because he felt this way as well.

"There's nothing better than being able to protect people without having to wield a sword."

Cordelia felt warmth from the words that Isma had calmly uttered, even though he had the skills, but Dahlia tilted her head.

"I think swords are important even if I don't have to protect anything. I think that if you train yourself, then you will improve yourself and overcome naivety."

"Dahlia-jou, what you just said sounds like something a master swordsman would say."

Dahlia looked proudly at Isma, who said he was looking forward to the future.

Cordelia thought her appearance was charming and smiled wryly wondering if escaping from her studies was included in her naivety.

After a while, the lunch that welcomed them was colourful and pleasant on the eyes. The appetiser was marinated duck, followed by salad, and the main dish was white fish fried with breadcrumbs, and stewed lamb shank. The bread was kneaded with raisins and walnuts.

Cordelia and Dahlia's plates were arranged beautifully, and Isma's dish was not only gorgeous but was also a large serving.

"It's very delicious. The meat melts in my mouth."

Dahlia was entranced, and her eating pace was much faster than Cordelia's, even though she had eaten much more than Cordelia, because she kept on going for seconds with the bread.

(Onii-sama's portion is especially big, but ours weren't small either...)

She eats really well, Cordelia thought as she tilted her head and asked Dahlia.

"Dahlia-sama, how often do you have sword practice?"

"I usually get taught once every three to four days. I really want to practice more, but I have to do independent practice and build up my physical strength every day. Why is that?"

"I was wondering if the amount of food isn't enough if you exercise a lot..."

But the amount of food should be enough if she exercises like she says she does, Cordelia thought, but Dahlia blurted a little embarrassingly, "Eh, mm..."

"We can prepare more food if it's not enough. Hans, what's available?"

"We still have meat and bread. And... the chefs can make something with eggs straight away."

"Then... Oh yes, do you want to try something unusual? I think Dahlia-jou would like the 『Tofu』 that Cordelia made topped with eggs."

"Then, please make some!"

Her body was full of energy and conveyed that she was happy that she was getting seconds. Cordelia was impressed by Isma's suggestion that made Dahlia delighted.

"Isma-sama, would you like dessert?"

"I'll like fruits like always. The other two would probably prefer something sweeter."

"Ojou-samas, we have chiffon cake and lava cake."

"Then, I'll have chiffon cake."

Cordelia thought that she could enjoy the lava cake during teatime, but Dahlia looked a little lost. Cordelia smiled.

"Dahlia-sama, please eat both."

"B-but..."

"The sweets at the Hale House are also delicious, but so are ours."

“Th-then... please.”

Cordelia thought it was cute and heart-warming because Dahlia wanted some even though she looked embarrassed.

But, at the same time, she thought perhaps...

“Do you have any plans after lunch?”

“I wondered if you would show me around the library. There should be interesting war chronicles there, right?”

“Yes, that’s right. If you can’t finish a book, then you can take it home.”

Actually, Cordelia wanted to talk in the greenhouse after lunch, but she thought that if they went to the library like Dahlia had suggested, then it would prevent her from escaping her studies.

So, after they had consumed their delicious meal, she decided to change the schedule and check out the library.

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After lunch, Dahlia, who had entered the library, looked around and was a little surprised.

“I’m interested in books about knights... but there’s a huge number of books.”

“Books about knights? In that case, the books around here might be hard to find.”

In response to Dahlia’s wishes, Isma picked up a slightly thick book from a slightly higher position on the shelf.

“There’s a lot of sentences in this book, but there aren’t that many difficult words, and it’s written formally, so it’s easy to understand.”

Dahlia happily began reading the bulky book she had been given.

But the more pages she turned, the slower she got. Then, she started dozing off.

(... I knew it.)

Cordelia, who had been reading another book, slowly approached Dahlia and lightly touched her shoulder.

“Dahlia-sama.”

“Wah?!”

“I, I’m sorry.”

Cordelia reflexively apologised to Dahlia's surprised reaction

But Dahlia was also surprised because Cordelia had apologised... or rather, she couldn't grasp the situation, but she seemed to have noticed that she had fallen asleep and her cheeks turned a little pink.

"By any chance, did you not get much sleep last night?"

"No, I slept normally. I've been very sleepy since noon..."

Dahlia said and sighed a little.

"I can't believe I dozed off even though it's such an interesting book... I've done something wasteful."

"We still have time, and I can lend you the book, so don't worry about it. By the way, do you always feel sleepy at this time?"

"Yes, I usually study languages and classics at this time, but I doze off. However, I don't think it's a problem if I can speak the language, and classics are never used."

(I see. It's not like she doesn't like studying, but it might be because she gets sleepy, so she doesn't want to study and doesn't make any progress.)

On top of that, if only her sister, who is close to her in age, pays attention to her skipping her lessons, then I can understand why she wants to rebel.

(I'm sure Dahlia-sama is an honest child. If I had to say it, then her attitude would be because no one pays attention to her except for Hazel-sama.)

However, I might be able to broaden her horizons a little. Especially with Isma-oniisama here. Cordelia glanced at Isma, who smiled wryly. He nodded at Cordelia, approached Dahlia and stared at her in the eyes.

"Classics is not a bad thing for knights to learn, because it is sometimes quoted in conversation, and the minimum requirements also appear in the exam."

Cordelia lightly told her that studying was necessary the other day, but the weight of those words might be different coming from an active knight. And if Dahlia has any questions, then Isma can respond to them right away.

"But I've heard that the knight's appointment exam is determined by overall points. Even if someone isn't good at classics, they can compensate for it in another part of the exam, can't they?"

"It's possible if your only goal is to pass the exam. However, you won't get the position you want, even if you become a knight, like that. It's always a competition."

Dahlia was speechless. She hadn't thought of this.

"Earl Hale is fluent in foreign languages as well, isn't he? It doesn't hurt to study languages and literature if you're aiming to become the Queen's guard. She'll be relieved if she can leave the interpreting to you."

"... Yes."

“I also have many things that I’m not good at, but rather than finding reasons not to improve, I find reasons to improve.”

Isma added and folded his arms.

“But, sleepy, huh. Why are you sleepy?”

“That’s probably... drowsiness caused by overeating.”

Cordelia said to Isma, who was thinking.

“I can’t say that’s the only cause, but it may be improved depending on how you eat.”

“Huh?”

Dahlia replied briefly because she was surprised, and Cordelia nodded.

Dahlia ate as much as she wanted and even ate twice as much bread as Cordelia had. She looked thrilled, but it was possible that she didn’t feel full because she didn’t chew her food enough.

(I think she’s just simply overeating, but she also ate a lot of bread. If you eat too many carbohydrates, your blood glucose levels will go down, and you’ll be drowsy from the insulin your body releases.)

And she’ll get drowsier if she has to study something that she’s not interested in. However, Cordelia decided to omit that from her explanation. Dahlia might be interested in getting rid of her drowsiness, but she wasn’t interested in why she was drowsy. Cordelia didn’t even know if blood glucose levels existed in this world, so she didn’t want to speak carelessly.

Cordelia coughed a little to cover this up.

“You should eat your vegetables first. And why don’t you eat less bread and eat moderately? And you should chew well. I think dairy products and fruits are better for dessert.”

If she chews well, then it should satisfy her hunger, and it would take time, so she should be able to stop herself from overeating. Dahlia twitched when she heard Cordelia’s words. *She’s probably opposed to restricting her diet.* Cordelia’s heart hurt a little because Dahlia looked like she was having so much fun when she was eating.

Next to Cordelia, Isma was thinking of a different idea.

“If you want to wake yourself up temporary, then you can wash your face... but that’s a little difficult during class time. Moving your body is also good, but this is also difficult during class.”

That’s also effective, but she probably won’t be able to do it. However, I can think of a way to stimulate her body.

“Please wait a little. I’ll be right back.”

After saying that, Cordelia headed straight to the laboratory.

Cordelia, who had entered the lab, took a bucket out from the cupboard and put water in it. She dropped a drop of tea tree and peppermint essential oil into the bucket. Tea tree, which had strong

sterilisation and antibacterial powers, was used by the indigenous people of Australia, the Aboriginal people, as ointment. During World War II, the French also used it to treat soldiers. Cordelia dipped the towel she had prepared into the water while smelling the fresh and sharp scent and squeezed it lightly. The cold compress was completed.

Then, she took carrier oil, absolute ethanol, and rosemary essential oil out from the cupboard. Rosemary is said to clear drowsiness and improve memory and concentration. Added to the sharp scent of the peppermint she had used earlier; it becomes perfumed oil with a stimulating smell.

Cordelia, who had prepared those two items, returned to the library.

“I’m sorry to keep you waiting, Dahlia-sama.”

“Welcome back, Cordelia-sama. This is?”

Cordelia smiled at Dahlia, who was staring curiously at the towel and small bottle in Cordelia’s hands.

“Please wipe your face a little with this.”

“I, I feel like air is passing through my nose.”

“Yes.”

Dahlia wasn’t widening her eyes in discomfort but in surprise.

“Is this a scent that Cordelia-sama made? But, it’s completely different from the candle that Hazel-oneesama always brags about... Is it a different fruit?”

“This is actually the scent of leaves. Please apply it to your hands and cheeks.”

Dahlia tilted her head at the words ‘scent of leaves’ and held the towel to her cheek. The towel had been cooled in cold water, and the coldness made her drowsiness fly away a little.

“Next, this small bottle. It might help you improve your concentration if you don’t hate the smell. Please spread this on your wrist and smell it.”

“This certainly smells like something that would wake me up.”

“But the main goal is that you want to do your best. You will indeed get sleepy when you’re full, but it’s important that you realise that you have to do it.”

Isma, who was watching the two, softly cut in. *The fragrance is certainly just an aid. Without motivation from the person in question, she will continue to feel drowsy.*

“Also, you will collapse if you don’t eat after you become a knight, so be careful.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. We move a ridiculous amount, so you’ll collapse if you don’t eat. At first, eating will feel like a job, and you’ll eat so much that it’ll become painful. But you’ll get used to this, and you won’t feel drowsy because training is horrifying.”

“Those meals are more quantity over quality,” Isma continued, but his words no longer reached Dahlia.

“Then, I only have to hold back for a little while, right?!”

“Well, and... you can change your class times if you’re really drowsy. You may find your studies interesting if you start to understand them.”

Cordelia didn’t know if those words reached her, but Dahlia looked happy and full of motivation. She just prayed that Dahlia’s quarrels with Hazel would become a memory of their youth one day.



After that, Dahlia, who had become completely excited, didn’t get drowsy again before she went home, and she held several books and the essential oil that Cordelia had given her to take home.

“Onii-sama, thank you very much for today.”

After they saw Dahlia off, Cordelia thanked Isma again, and he shook his head lightly.

“No, I experienced something rare. I didn’t have the chance to think about what happened before I became a knight, and I remembered some things. You can’t forget your original intentions.”

“I’ll remember that.”

“But the Hale House isn’t a military family, so I’m sure the Earl is worried. If Dahlia-jou does get appointed as a knight, then maybe I should help ease his worries.”

Isma, who whispered as if he was talking to himself, looked like a senior worried about his junior or like a teacher worried about his student.

“But I’m glad that you don’t say you want to be a knight, Cordelia.”

“Oh my, are you worried?”

Cordelia tilted her head at his sudden words.

Although Beatrice-sama had become a knight, so I can’t tell him not to worry at all, but, strangely, he’s worried enough to say it. Cordelia thought, and Isma smiled impishly.

“Ah, but it’s not like Cordelia will be doing this and that, it’s father’s attitude that will change. Even if you tell him that you want to train, he’ll train you eternally and won’t stop until you give up on being a knight.”

Cordelia smiled wryly.

(But, if you think about it, even Otou-sama was injured on duty and had to retire. If I say that I want to be in a place like that, then he would be worried even if our family is a family of knights.)

Although we’re close with the knights, because both my Onii-samas are knights, it’s definitely a dangerous place. Will Dahlia-sama be alright even if she’s appointed?

Cordelia thought, and a big hand placed itself on her head.

“You’ll regret it if you get told that you can’t from the start, right? I’m sure Dahlia-jou is the same.”

“... Yes.”

“And that child is similar to you. I don’t think she’ll give up easily, and I don’t think she’ll come to a conclusion about becoming a knight or not just because of today. And, if you wanted to become a knight, don’t you think that you would go through with it and won’t give up no matter how much father opposes? That’s why I think it’ll be eternal training.”

She couldn’t help but be convinced by the words she heard as her head was lightly patted. Dahlia-sama indeed seems like she’ll continue to take the exam until she passes, even if she fails. And if she’s confident in her martial arts, then like Isma-oniisama had said, she could get appointed even if the results of her written exam are terrible. However, I can’t say for sure if her wish will come true or not.

(Um, that’s true, but...)

Cordelia thought, and couldn’t lift her face.

It wasn’t like she wasn’t convinced by Isma’s words, but she was really embarrassed because she hadn’t experienced someone patting her head for this long.

“Oh yes, Cordelia. Can you give me what you gave to Dahlia-jou?”

“Onii-sama, are you having trouble with drowsiness as well?”

“No, that’s not it. I have some things I have to memorise, so I wanted to use it for a change of pace.”

“Then, I’ll prepare some so you can take it to the dormitory tomorrow.”

“Thanks. I guess I’ll go back to my room.”

He finally took his hand away from her head and returned to his room. Cordelia watched his back as he walked and thought.

(Him having to memorise a few things... Does that have to do with what he and Cyrus-oniisama were talking about?)

She couldn’t ask for details, but she wanted to give him what he wanted even if something was up, or even if nothing was happening.

(And, I’ll prepare so that if they want something else, I can give it to them.)

If this is related to their work, then it might be difficult for me to help them because of confidentiality. Still, I want to make an effort so that I can help them straight away if I’m ordered to someday.

(To do that, I need to build enough trust between us so that they would give me an order.)

Of course, this is related to my abilities as well, but if they don’t trust me, then they won’t entrust me with anything. Cordelia thought as she returned to her room.

Act 45: Good News Comes with the Storm

That morning, Cordelia woke up earlier than usual. But it was already too late to go back to sleep, so she decided to read a book until breakfast and went to the library.

Even if it was early for Cordelia, if she looked down at the garden from the corridor, she could see that there were servants already at work. The servant holding the flowers were probably going to decorate the vases in the mansion. She watched them and was looking forward to seeing how they would decorate the vases.

Cordelia, who reached her destination while occasionally greeting the servants she passed on the way, noticed that the library was already lit.

She thought it was strange as she entered the library and saw that Ronnie was surrounded by books.

“Morning, Ronnie. You’re really early.”

“Eh, huh? Ojou-sama? It’s time for good morning...? Don’t tell me it’s already morning?”

“Yes. It’s still a bit early for breakfast, but it’s a pleasant morning.”

However, when Ronnie heard those words, he looked troubled and appeared clearly regretful.

“Did you accidentally stay up all night?”

“Yes... I was careless. I didn’t feel drowsy, but now that I know it’s morning, I suddenly feel sleepy.”

Cordelia smiled wryly at Ronnie, who yawned as soon as he’d said that, and looked at the book he was reading. It was a book about magic combat, but it wasn’t written in the language of Crista Kingdom.

“This is rare.”

Ronnie reads books of any genre, but Cordelia had never seen him read foreign magic combat books. In the first place, he didn’t like combat that much that he would stay all night reading about it.

“Well, I don’t hate reading... but, I heard a rumour that bothered me, so I thought I would review.”

“Rumour?”

“I don’t think it’s true, but in the north... I heard at the bar that there have been strange movements in Dulaus Kingdom recently.”

Cordelia blinked. *That certainly is a rumour that would worry people.*

Dulaus Kingdom had a cease-fire agreement with Crista Kingdom, but it was difficult to say that it was a friendly kingdom. Since its founding, Crista Kingdom has been invaded by Dulaus Kingdom many times, and a lot of people have negative feelings towards the King Dulaus. And, Crista Kingdom was being resented in return, as Dulaus Kingdom probably had a less than favourable opinion towards a kingdom who made them turn their heels many times in the past.

However, for Cordelia, she was cautious towards that kingdom because it was the stronghold of the Dark Guild member 『Ghost』.

“Strange movements? How reliable is that rumour?”

Cordelia had never set foot in a bar before, so she couldn't determine how useful the information was. However, if there were really such strange movements, then the Kingdom's army would have sensed it, and Cordelia would have noticed something, even if she didn't go to a bar. Then, Elvis and her two brothers' holidays would be affected, and they wouldn't come home much, but that wasn't the case right now. More importantly, Ronnie, who had heard the rumour, didn't seem serious, and he didn't seem panicked.

“Of course, it's not like they're going to attack straight away. However, I heard that there is movement from the anti-royal faction in that kingdom, and I remembered that the north's magic is different from the mainstream magic of this kingdom, which I learnt at the Magic Academy.”

“... In other words, you remembered that because of the rumours and got curious, so you read up on it?”

“Yes. Even if there's magic I don't understand somewhere, I think I can manage somehow if I understand the foundation. Well, it would be better if I don't encounter it though.”

Seeing that Ronnie was joking and shrugging, she concluded that he was concerned, but he was also saying that the current situation wouldn't become serious straight away.

“But it would be best if it doesn't become serious. Cyrus-oniisama's wedding, which had been postponed, is already around the corner.”

Christina and Cyrus postponed their wedding because Christina had to review the union and the organisation because of the Flora Silk incident, and Cyrus had to work. They were finally... going to get married, but if another problem occurred, then who knows when they would actually get married.

However, if such a significant incident really happened, then they wouldn't have time to worry about that matter... but, the best solution would be if nothing happened at all.

“Well, if anything does affect the royal capital, then Master wouldn't let you stay here. Ertiga is further away from Dulaus.”

“That's true.”

Cordelia smiled wryly at Ronnie, who joked around and shrugged. Elvis probably wouldn't tell her things that had to do with military affairs, but it was possible that he would send her away under the pretence of inspections or studying.

However, even if we're talking about a foreign kingdom, the world of the royal families is complicated.

(... I'm a member of a feudal lord's family, even if the scale is different. I have to be level-headed.)

I'm not directly involved with the royal family, but I must support them as a noble. We must contribute via the peace of our fiefs, but I also want to do something for the citizens of our fief.

“Say, can I read that too? I'm curious about magic that is different from ours.”

“... Ojou-sama, you can't read this.”

“Oh my, why not?”

“I don’t know what you would do if you learn something new, and I’m too sleepy to answer any questions. And you don’t have enough time because you have other things you have to learn, right?”

“『It sounds like a hassle』. Is it my imagination, or can I hear your real feelings?”

“Ahaha, you imagined it.”

It was apparent that Ronnie was trying to deceive her, but he was right. Research, magic, studying, and other things... she barely had any time.

“Do you agree?”

“Then, I’ll ask you next time. But will you accompany me today with the little free time I have?”

“Were you doing something today?”

“I want to go to the mobile library office because I have a document I want to deliver. I don’t mind if you sleep when we get there.”

“Well, I’ll go if I can sleep. I’ll go! Shall I arrange the carriage?”

“Please do. We’ll leave after breakfast.”

Ronnie, who had a smile on his face, quickly put the book away and flew out of the library. An invitation to get rid of his sleepiness was really attractive. Cordelia smiled wryly as she picked some books and returned to her room.

She hadn’t meant to, but she had also taken the Dulaus book with her.

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After breakfast, Cordelia, who had quickly gotten ready, headed to the office with Ronnie.

The sky was so clear that she thought it would be nice to go on a walk too.

Cordelia, who had arrived at the office and opened the door, was soon met by a middle-aged man holding a wooden box.

“Oh, Cordelia-sama!! I’m sorry for how I look.”

“No, don’t worry about it. I’m sorry for bothering you.”

The man, who was smiling friendly, was the manager and librarian of this office.

When Ronnie saw the man, he approached him straight away and took the box.

“This goes over there, right?”

“Thanks. Then, Cordelia-sama, please come this way.”

Cordelia was invited to sit on the window table she always used when she was in the office. She sat down and spread the documents that she had brought with her on the table.

“Here is a list of the books that were donated this time. Some need to be repaired, so I’ll deliver them as soon as it’s finished. I think it’ll take 10 days.”

“Alright. I’ll prepare the bookshelves. Oh, yes, I’ve received letters of thanks from the children again. I’m sure they were here... Ah, here it is.”

“Thank you very much.”

Cordelia, who received more letters than usual, glanced over them.

It was an important job for Cordelia to summarise the children’s feedback. A happy impression can motivate the supporters and can be used as a reference for new books. Unexpectedly, there were a lot of opinions from their parents, so the information they received was broad.

“Manager, I’d like to take my time today. Also, do you mind showing me the handicraft corner?”

“Of course, take your time. The wood-carvings of animals that Cordelia-sama proposed is really popular. The villagers are happy to deliver addition goods.”

The wood-carvings that the manager was talking about were cute figurines that always came back to an upright position. All of them were small and round, and the eyes were filled with small, crushed and polished natural stones.

(Wood-carvings are already cute on their own, but will they be more popular if it’s combined with natural stones? I thought it would, and I’m glad that it is popular.)

Cordelia, who was fascinated by the cuteness of the roly-polies, suggested that natural stones be inserted in the eyes, and the trial product was given to the women who worked in her mansion. She had stocked up a lot at the handicraft corner based on the excellent feedback she had received from the servants... If it needed restocking, then she felt relieved that it had been a success.

(I think I’ll be able to sell kumiki puzzles[1] too... But I’ll ask Otou-sama if we can sell it in Ertiga. They already have roly-polies in Ertiga, but they don’t have kumiki puzzles yet, so it should be alright to sell them at the fief.)

High-quality wood is the Pameradia fief’s forte. If so, then they could also become a new fief speciality.

“Come to think of it, Cordelia-sama. I heard that there is a reasonable and beautiful shop in the port town, Welf, which offers snacks and sweets that aren’t seen in this area. I heard it’s famous because you can catch a glimpse of noble pleasures, but are you planning on opening a shop around here?”

“Huh? Have the rumours already reached here?”

He was talking about the shop that Cordelia had received advice from Cyrus about, and proposed to Elvis to start selling crepes and galettes.

She opened a stall with Welf's gallettes at the Harvest Festival in Ertiga, and a stall selling Ertiga's crepe desserts at Welf's Good Haul Prayer Festival, and both sold incredibly well.

Later, Cordelia set up a shop in each town in response to the reaction the stalls received. Both shops weren't very large, but careful attention was paid to the interior design and furnishings, so that no one would suspect the Pameradia House's social status. However, she was troubled by the initial investments because she wanted to make the price reasonable so that commoners could visit without much difficulty... She never imagined that the rumours of her shops would reach the royal capital.

"There are some who chose Welf as their travel destination because they want to visit the rumoured shop."

"This is the first time I've heard of this. But I'm very happy."

If this is true, then I've received more publicity than I imagined. In the future, it might be useful to open a store under the Pameradia House's name when I sell the balms. Should I put a questionnaire in the store as soon as possible so I can know the trends of the customers?

"If you do open a shop in the royal capital, then I can introduce you to a good location. It isn't well-ordered like the noble district, but it's a place where people with good palates gather, and the shop will be famous if it's delicious."

"I would love to hear about it when the time comes."

The unexpected information nearly made Cordelia rejoice, but she had to be calm. *First, I have to calm down and understand the current situation. I have to be down to earth or success can quickly change into failure. I'm terrified that the things I have built up will collapse in an instant...* Cordelia thought, then she heard the front door open.

"Hello."

"Oh, Vernoux-sama. Good morning."

It's rare for Vernoux-sama to come to the office early in the morning. He usually comes in the afternoon, Cordelia thought as she headed to the entrance.

But, in contrast to Cordelia's greeting, Vernoux slanted his eyes, and he didn't reply.

"Do you not feel well?"

He looked as if he was in a bad mood, if that didn't have to do with his health, but Cordelia hesitated to say that. *It's harder to deal with him if he's in a bad mood, so I want a different answer from him...* She thought, but Vernoux gave a long sigh. *Unfortunately, it seems like he is in a bad mood.*

"Dilly, why haven't you been at home since morning? I came over, but it was a waste of time."

“Vernoux-sama, you rarely come to my house early in the morning, right? And, people normally check the other person’s schedule beforehand.”

Cordelia shrugged. *Even if I tell him at this point, I probably can’t expect that he would make an appointment. However, usually, it would be amusing...* However, when Vernoux heard Cordelia’s answer, he looked stunned and tilted his head in an exaggerated way.

“Even though I was bringing you good news...”

“Good news? From you?”

“Do you want to know?”

“If you act pompous like that, then I don’t know if I want to know or not... I feel like it’ll be bad news.”

The reason being, Vernoux looked like he was planning something. *Did something crazy or unpleasant happen?* ——— Cordelia put up her guard, and Vernoux looked stunned.

“Why do I have to deliver bad news first thing in the morning? That’s tiresome.”

“That’s true, but I can’t think of any good news that you have to tell first thing in the morning either.”

“Jeez, you don’t hold back at all. But don’t worry, it’s happy news. You’ve been accepted in the competition show.”

“... Excuse me?”

Cordelia couldn’t help but tilt her head at his surprising words. *Come to think of it, the competition show screening should be finished, and it’s nearly time for the exhibition.* She recalled, but her doubt preceded her joy.

“What the? That’s a weak reaction.”

“Oh, yes...”

“It’s not a joke or anything. This is being told to the person herself, so even Earl Pameradia doesn’t know about it yet.”

“Then, why do you know, Vernoux-sama?”

Cordelia asked since she wouldn’t rejoice while she was confused, and Vernoux smiled.

“Because it’s one of the events organised by the kingdom, right? The Queen, who is involved in the screening, usually informs the participants every year, but this year’s notice was left to His Highness, Prince Sylvester.”

“Perhaps...”

“It was convenient, so he left it to me. It’s a notice from the delivery personnel. So, will you go to the castle? Miss Prize-Winner.”

She felt like she heard the words, “the permit for the Big Bookcase is waiting for you,” but it took all she had to not twitch.

She did think that an award ceremony might be held since the prize for the royal family sponsored competition show was a grant and a permit.

(But I never imagined that His Highness would be involved in this before his adulthood...!)

I carelessly assumed that, even though the royal family didn't have a rule stating that they wouldn't be involved in events unless they were adults. However, if I think about it, this might be an excellent event to gain experience if it's just about giving notice.

(I was careless... But I can't say that I wouldn't have entered even if I knew this. Because there aren't many chances to get a permit for the Big Bookcase...)

So, it can't be helped. Cordelia convinced herself and tried to calm down. That's right. It should be over quickly if I just have to receive the permit.

However, she recalled something else that worried her.

“... Vernoux-sama, did you say ‘go’?”

“Yeah. The quicker, the better, right?”

“Please wait. There are no arrangements for the winner to go to the castle right after they receive the announcement, right?”

No matter how I look at it, this is too sudden.

Cordelia needed time to dress up and prepare herself, even if she couldn't avoid her audience with the Prince. If possible, she also wanted to prepare responses for the Prince.

However, Vernoux scowled in response to Cordelia's remark.

“You don't have to worry about that.”

“No, I do.”

It certainly feels like I'm going to tremble, but usually, it was odder if people don't worry.

Cordelia stated that while glaring at him a little, and Vernoux sighed as if it was troublesome.

“Like you guessed, there will be a formal award ceremony... well, it's not that grand, but His Majesty will say a few words to congratulate you. But that's after the exhibition period ends, it's customary to give the Big Bookcase permit first. The earlier you get to enter the Big Bookcase the better, right?”

“I appreciate it, but... I'll be given it on the day of the announcement, right?”

“No, His Highness said you can come get it whenever you want, so I just thought I'll take you there today. The faster, the better, right?”

As expected, Vernoux-sama is the cause of this suddenness...!

Cordelia thought and was exhausted.

“Has His Highness already acknowledged that I will be visiting today?”

“Yeah, I told him. He told me not to force you. He said you might have plans since it was so sudden.”

Cordelia liked the Prince a little more because he knew full-well that Vernoux is forceful, and tried to stop him, but she was worried.

I don't mind if it's today or later... What reason do you tell a person who says this, to change the day? And even if I make a reason, Vernoux-sama will probably pursue it.

“Vernoux-sama, even if I go to the castle today, I can't go straight away. I'm dressed like this right now.”

She wore today's outfit so she would be trouble-free because she was visiting the office... In short, she was dressed as a town girl instead of a noble daughter. Even if she went to the castle today, she would need to change her outfit.

But, Vernoux shook his head.

“You're always dressed like that, so it's fine, right? His Highness doesn't really fuss over women's clothing.”

“It's a big problem. The castle isn't my house nor is it town.”

“... If you're going to put it that way, then I don't mind if you change it to another day. His Highness said he could host a tea party if you come on another day.”

“I'm sorry, Vernoux-sama. I need some time to go home and change, would it be alright for me to go?”

For a moment, she thought she had been saved, but Cordelia understood that changing the date would choke her.

If I'm going to get a troublesome invitation like a tea party, then today is better.

“You don't have to push yourself, you know?”

“I'm not. I feel bad for taking up His Highness's busy time again.”

“Well, alright. There's no reason for me to say no if you say you're going to go.”

While reciprocating with a smile, Cordelia couldn't help but think that her bad premonition was spot on. A terrible pitfall was waiting for her on the way to the Big Bookcase.

“Ah, come to think of it, Vernoux-sama. I was allowed to exhibit my work as a joint project with Ronnie, but should I call him as well?”

“Yeah, that's why I came... but is it inconvenient?”

“Ronnie isn't feeling very well. If possible, would it be alright for me to go alone? If we have to go today, then we can have it another day...”

Ronnie, who was still sleeping, was only lacking sleep, but she wanted him to relax if possible. Cordelia didn't want to appear in front of the Prince alone, but she was anxious about Ronnie's etiquette. It was inevitable even if they have an audience with the King at a later day, but Ronnie didn't want to appear in front of the royal family, and Cordelia was nervous, so nobody wins.

Vernoux put a hand on his chin and thought for a while, then he lightly nodded.

“It’s okay since you’re just getting the permit. If he can’t come right away, then I can ask His Highness about his schedule and get in touch with you later. I’ll show you around if you come to the castle, so come to the east gate.”

“The east gate, right? Okay.”

“Then, I’ll go to the castle first.”

In the return carriage, Cordelia wrote a letter to Elvis, who was at the castle, to let him know what was happening. She wrote that she had received the results of the competition show and that she would be heading to the castle today. The words she had written in the swaying carriage were shaky, but it was unavoidable.

(It would be better to let him know before I go to the castle.)

Since she had received permission for the exhibition, it shouldn’t be a problem for her to obtain the permit, but the castle is where Elvis usually works. Somehow, it felt awkward not to inform him of this.

(If possible, I would like Otou-sama to bring the permit home.)

Cordelia sighed as she folded the letter. However, she could visit the Big Bookcase if she could get past it.

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When Cordelia got home, she headed straight to her room.

“If it’s just His Highness, then it would be ideal to wear something that would leave a weak impression... but, I might meet other people on my way to see him, so I have to avoid them questioning my fashion sense.”

However, all the dresses she had were those she liked, so they had unique features. She was supposed to choose her favourite dress, but she felt depressed. She somehow felt bad towards the dresses.

“I’d rather wear a dress that will hype me up and support me emotionally.”

Christina said before that she receives power from her dresses. Cordelia thought it was a good idea and finally picked a dress.

“This is definitely the dress to wear to hype myself up.”

It was the flora silk dress she had received from Earl Alcott.

Cordelia wore this as her finest dress to family birthdays and tea parties that her aunt Nirupama took her to. She liked the dress quite a bit, but the size was becoming a problem.

(I pray that I won’t grow any taller until Onii-sama’s wedding.)

She could imagine that she would grow to some extent when she looked at her tall family. But she didn't mind if she stopped growing soon. It was really disappointing that she couldn't wear that flora silk dress anymore. This dress was designed for young ladies rather than children, so she could still wear it if height wasn't a problem.

Cordelia, who had decided on the dress, called Emina and Lara. She told them what had happened and asked them to help her prepare.

"Understood, Ojou-sama. Lara, get the carriage ready."

"Yes, right away."

Cordelia, who was quickly changed, sat down in front of the dresser as Emina gently combed her hair.

"Ojou-sama, since you're going to the castle, how about using a little lipstick? And, I want to set your hair, is this alright?"

"Set my hair?"

"Yes, your usual hairstyle is nice, but if you're going to the castle, then I think you should look more grown-up. I'm sure it would look good on you."

It was a slightly surprising proposal to Cordelia, who had never been conscious of having an adult aura, even though she tried to avoid giving a childish impression. She thought about it for a while and eventually agreed.

"Yes... Please."

It's still not time yet, so if it doesn't suit me then I can get her to redo it, and Emina probably wouldn't propose something that wouldn't suit me, considering her fashion sense.

(Besides, it's probably calming to get my hair done, and my feelings will probably calm down too.)

Unfortunately, her prediction was wrong, and she couldn't settle down until her hair was all done.

But her hairstyle made her blink.

"It looks good on you."

"Th-thanks."

"My pleasure. I had fun as well."

She wasn't used to seeing the hairstyle reflected in the mirror and didn't know if it suited her or not. However, she did feel that the hairstyle suited the dress very much. She also gave off an adult impression like Emina had expected, and although she was happy, she felt embarrassed and uneasy.

"Then, Ojou-sama. Look here too."

Cordelia stood up at Emina's recommendation and looked in the full-length mirror. Her fully dressed up image reflected back at her.

(This... I might not be this composed.)

The hair and dress matched better than she had expected, and she certainly looked like a young lady who would not be ashamed, no matter where she went. However, she was worried that she looked too fired up. She did want to get hyped up, but she didn't intend to go this far.

(It's like I dressed myself up so that His Highness would look at me...!)



I'm glad that she did my hair, but she did too much.

However, she couldn't tell the smiling Emina that she wanted to untangle the hairdo, and if she says it looks good, then Cordelia would ask her to do it again in the future. So, she should try to calm down and clear this hurdle.

(It's okay, I'm just getting the permit. Peacefully... I'll come back safely.)

Cordelia convinced herself and looked in the mirror, then she heard a knock at the door.

It was Lara who had returned.

"The carriage is ready. And Vernoux-sama sent a message."

"Thanks."

She opened the letter which had been handed to her nervously and saw that the appointed time was written on there like she had expected. She would have perfect timing if she headed there after lunch.

However, since she had a fairly good amount of time, Cordelia felt suspicious.

(Did His Highness really free up his time?)

Don't tell me Vernoux-sama forced him to open up his schedule... I'd like to believe this isn't true, but if it is, then it would look like I had behaved selfishly. That's the thing I don't want the most.

"Ojou-sama, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm a little nervous because it's my first formal meeting at the castle. The appointment is a little after midday. I'm sorry, but could you prepare me a light lunch?"

My reaction might have seemed weird since I had dressed up to go to the castle. However, I don't have the authority to change the specified time. I can only believe in Vernoux-sama.

"Understood, I'll tell the chefs. In exchange, you have to eat a lot for dinner."

"Okay, I'll leave it to you."

I'm not really in the mood to eat, but I don't want my stomach to growl in public.

"... When it's all over, I'll have a toast."

There shouldn't be any competition at the castle, but I want to drink good alcohol for success.

Unfortunately, Cordelia wasn't confident that alcohol won't influence her, so she only had juice, but she was looking forward to having some with dinner.

After lunch, Cordelia asked Emina to accompany her to the castle, and Hans appeared in a rush.

“Hans, what’s wrong?”

After asking that, Cordelia realised that Elvis was behind him, even though he would definitely not be home at that time, and quickly approached him.

“Welcome home, Otou-sama.”

“Yeah.”

However, even though he was home, she could guess that it was only temporary from the way Hans was rushing. But she couldn’t come up with a reason for why he was home.

“Otouto-sama, did something happen?”

There was no response from Elvis, but it was unlikely that he had forgotten something at home, and, if he had, then he could have just sent a messenger.

(Oh, that’s right. I sent him the report...)

He had already received the letter since he hadn’t said anything upon seeing that Cordelia was ready to go out. However, a letter was a letter. She should report that she had won the reward again, but she wanted to ask something else first.

“This hairstyle... does it suit me?”

She had faith in Emina’s skills. But, she wanted to hear Elvis’s honest opinion as his daughter. However, her tension increased after she had asked that.

Elvis finally opened his mouth slowly at Cordelia, who was holding her breath as she waited for a reply.

“... Aren’t you cold?”

“Huh? No, I’m not...”

It was true that her hair usually covered her neck and back, so there were a lot of areas for air to touch. However, she didn’t feel cold because of the season.

Cordelia tilted her head, and Elvis turned to Emina.

“Understood. I’ll bring a shawl.”

Emina left after she bowed respectfully.

(But I’m really not cold...)

For the time being, it’s not like I don’t look good even if I look really cold.

It’s a bit disappointing since I didn’t receive a clear answer, but doesn’t seem like he’s dismissing my hairstyle.

However, I wanted to hear his opinion if possible...

“... It's not... bad.”

“——— Thank you very much!”

Cordelia, who was observing him, was praised by Elvis, who looked sour like usual. He hadn't said anything else, but coming from him, it was enough.

“Are you going to the castle now?”

“Yes. Vernoux-sama will be picking me up at the east gate.”

“Then I'll take you there.”

“Huh?! Th-thank you very much.”

Cordelia was surprised when she realised what time Elvis had come home. She never imagined that he would briefly return home for her. Still, she felt at ease if she was with him.

“I feel relieved that you'll be with me Otou-sama.”

If possible, she would like him to accompany her to meet the Prince, but her wish won't come true. The notice itself came to Cordelia... In other words, it might be undesirable for her to be accompanied by an adult, since she was treated as an adult. And, Elvis only said that he would accompany her to where Vernoux was.

(If I ask for too much, then it would look like Otou-sama is using his daughter to intervene.)

This would only be a disadvantage to both Cordelia and Elvis, so she had to accept it.

“... You look worried.”

“Excuse me?”

“You only need to be dignified as you head to the castle.”

Cordelia quickly followed after Elvis, who had turned his back and started walking.

Thank you for worrying about me, Cordelia thought that Elvis would be uncomfortable if she told him that, so she held back, but she was deeply grateful.

In the carriage, Cordelia told Elvis that the reputation of the galettes and crepes had reached the royal capital to distract herself. She also told him that she wanted to conduct questionnaires at the stores in the future.

“... It's probably because the food is rare, but they probably also appreciate the interior design and furnishings.”

“Yes. I heard about that from the manager as well.”

“The downtown restaurants aren't bad either, but it's easier to talk about them if the ambience is distinct.”

Cordelia imagined enjoying an affordable meal at a bustling restaurant downtown. *The position might be reversed, but if I can enjoy a different ambience... then I'm sure it'll feel special.*

"Don't go on your own."

"Yes."

It seemed that Cordelia's interest was clear, since Elvis had said that.

I want to go, and it seems like I can as long as it's not on my own. Cordelia smiled in reply.

I'm looking forward to it. If possible, I would like to go with Otou-sama. Cordelia thought, but she was pulled right back to reality.

She looked at the carriage and saw that they were already approaching the white castle walls.

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Vernoux was waiting at the east gate just like he had promised.

He saw Elvis and opened his eyes wide. However, he quickly changed his expression and tried to greet Elvis, but Elvis didn't even glance at Vernoux and walked off.

"... Shall we go?"

"Yes."

On the way, Cordelia's tension rose again. Vernoux sighed deeply next to her.

"What's wrong?"

"... The Earl is angry, isn't he? He looked scary."

"Scary? Vernoux-sama, that's rude. Otou-sama was just a little reserved."

It was true that Elvis's expression might seem sharp to Vernoux, since his father is cheerful, but his remark was rude toward someone else's father. Cordelia forgot her tension and argued.

"No, but, he obviously wasn't being reserved. Well, it might not be impossible, since he had an iron wall guard until now."

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, if there is another opportunity. Anyway... It seems like you really did have to get ready. You certainly seem different."

Cordelia took a long hard look at Vernoux, who had fully understood something on his own, and averted her eyes a little.

I didn't think it would be a big deal to look like this in front of my childhood friend even if I do look different, but it's embarrassing when he points it out. Her tension, which had subsided, rose once again.

“The truth is... You thought I lied?”

“No, sorry. Honestly, I thought you were just saying whatever came to mind.”

“I’m getting the permit, so I won’t do that.”

Cordelia turned away as if she was sulking. She was aware that her childish attitude didn’t match with how she looked, but it was perfect for hiding her embarrassment.

When she turned her head away from Vernoux, she saw a beautiful garden.

“What? Are you interested in the garden?”

“... Yes, a little.”

“You can look at the greenhouse as well, before you go back. The greenhouse was originally designed by Earl Pameradia, and His Highness will probably let you see it if you ask him. Maybe he’ll even show you around.”

However, Cordelia couldn’t agree with that.

“I am interested, but I think it’s too brazen, so I’ll ask him if I get another chance to. Even if Otou-sama designed it, I wasn’t involved.”

The act of coaxing the Prince was something she wanted to avoid because it was associated with the in-game 『Cordelia』 ; a selfish young lady. In the first place, she wanted to get away from him as quickly as possible, so she wanted to avoid things that come with horrifying possibilities.

“You don’t have to be shy. Oh yes, let’s say it’s from me as an apology for earlier?”

“Don’t worry about it. If you want to apologise, then please give me delicious tea leaves. I’ll be happier with that.”

Vernoux shrugged at Cordelia’s words.

They stopped talking when they passed through the garden and entered the castle. Cordelia quietly followed Vernoux through the corridor. Then, Vernoux stopped before long.

“His Highness is in this room. Are you ready?”

“Yes, always.”

Enter, greet him, and receive the permit... She imagined, but she didn’t doubt her mannerism themselves.

In contrast to Cordelia, who was looking straight ahead, Vernoux was casual.

“He cleared everyone away, so well, you can take it easy.”

“Isn’t it better if there were people there?”

“Why?”

“What if I say something rash or what if I start spreading strange rumours? It would be fine if it were someone close to His Highness, but with me, there are too many problems.”

“I’m not worried since you declared those possibilities. Oh, even if he cleared everyone out, I’ll be there as a witness.”

“...”

I’m not sure if I should be relieved that he would be here or not.

When we first met, I thought that I could get information from Vernoux-sama so that I can avoid the Prince, but I can’t believe that he would be the cause for us meeting.

(It’s a bit late now, but I really hadn’t expected this.)

It’s not like I don’t wonder how this happened, but it’s not fatal yet. I probably won’t meet the Prince for a while after I receive the permit.

Vernoux lightly greeted the two guards at the door and told them that he was entering, but the guards looked troubled.

When Vernoux tried to ask for the reason, a vigorous voice came from within.

『That’s why, I said ———.』

『So ———... I said!』

Vernoux and Cordelia looked at each other when they heard a young man’s voice.

“It’s a bit lively in there.”

“Yeah... That Clay is going on a rampage again.”

The owner of the voice was Vernoux’s acquaintance.

“Well, but, he’s always like that. Don’t worry about it.”

“Vernoux-sama, we should see how it goes...”

“It’s not going to end quickly with him like this. His Highness is also there, right? Now, let’s go in.”

Vernoux forcibly grabbed Cordelia’s arm and took a step forward even though she was puzzled by the unexpected situation.

Cordelia was surprised by his sudden movement, and immediately tried to return to her earlier posture, but his stride was wider than she had imagined.

“Vernoux-sama, please wait.”

“I told you that you don’t have to worry.”

“That’s not it!”

The heels that she was wearing to match her dress couldn’t handle Vernoux’s movement. She wanted him to let her go at least, so she tried to protest, but he opened the door.

Vernoux continued forward, and Cordelia lost her balance.

“Kyaa...?!”

Cordelia, who couldn't sense where her centre of gravity was, raised a voice she'd never heard before and fell forward.



Act 46: Meeting the Prince for the First Time in Two Years

Awful.

This situation can be summed up with that one word.

Vernoux-sama seemed to have predicted the accident when he heard my sudden voice and caught me before I hit the ground, but this situation wouldn't have happened had he not pulled me in the first place. When she thought that, she couldn't help but hold a grudge against him instead of being thankful.

The room where the voices were echoing from until a while ago had gone entirely silent.

“... Vernoux-dono, what on earth are you doing?!”

“Well, sorry. Hold up. Are you alright, Dilly?”

Please call an ophthalmologist if you think I'm alright... Would it be nice if I cuss him like that right now?

No matter how you look at it, this is a really embarrassing entry, Cordelia thought as she thought about how to break the status quo. If I don't regain my balance, then I won't be able to get out of Vernoux-sama's arms. With her eyes still dropped on the ground, she carefully adjusted her feet while desperately trying to calm down. If I rush myself and actually fall down, then I won't be able to make any excuses or recover.

“... So, Vernoux-dono. What are you doing?”

“Clay, you were nagging His Highness, weren't you? Dilly got shy because of you, and we were going to enter so she didn't have to worry. It's my fault for pulling her, and I have reflected on this.”

“Nagging...?! Whose fault do you think it is in the first place?!”

“Ah, oh, I'll listen to you later. We have a guest... That's not it... Is that how you act in front of His Highness? And, close the door for me.”

The young man in glasses, who was named Clay, gave a long sigh, then he glanced at the door. Then, the sound of the door closing was heard. The guards had closed the door. Vernoux could have told the guards to close the door instead of Clay, but he seemed somewhat upset.

While listening to their exchange, Vernoux and Clay knew each other better than Cordelia had thought. If so, then he should be able to guess that this blunder had been caused by Vernoux.

She felt somehow relieved that it was still somewhat better even if this situation was undesirable, and an unfamiliar pair of boots entered the edge of her vision.

At that moment, Cordelia froze.

“Are you alright? Are your legs hurt?”

That voice was clearly different from Clay's and Vernoux's.

However, that didn't mean she didn't know who it was.

The person who Clay was complaining to was the Prince. Vernoux had said that he had cleared everyone away.

Thus, she knew who the owner of this voice was... even if she didn't see his face.

(It can't be anyone else but His Highness, Sylvester...!)

Cordelia forcefully moved her stiff body, separated herself from Vernoux, who was supporting her and bent her legs.

"Please pardon my discourtesy in front of you, Your Highness. I am honoured that you have invited me here today. Cordelia Enna Pameradia, here at your request."

It wasn't appropriate to greet His Highness at the entrance, but there was no other way.

"Please raise your head. Vernoux is probably the one at fault for what had just happened."

The moment she heard those gentle words, she bit her lip. However, she couldn't keep looking at the ground forever. *Didn't I prepare myself so I can face him?*

Cordelia told herself as she calmed herself and slowly looked up.

A young boy with gold eyes and a gentle expression caught her eye.

"It's been a long time. Do you remember me?"

"——— Yes."

She felt that his aura was closer to the game Sylvester than when she saw him two years ago at the Flantheim mansion.

And, she noticed something else.

(... I've seen a similar scene in the game.)

I'm sure that there was a scene where the Heroine looked up at His Highness, Sylvester at this angle. It's like I'm looking at a nightmare, but I can't help but notice this.

"... Does it hurt after all?"

Sylvester seemed worried because Cordelia was taking her time to reply, and she hesitantly nodded, "A little."

It actually didn't hurt that much. However, if my feet hurt, then I probably wouldn't have to stay here for long. Also, it's not a complete lie since it's not like it doesn't hurt at all.

However, Sylvester looked a little upset by Cordelia's reply.

"That's not good. Vernoux, call the doctor..."

"Huh?! It's fine!"

"But..."

That would make my visit longer, and this incident will get bigger. Cordelia hastily concluded and declined the offer. However, Sylvester wasn't convinced.

Then, Cordelia heard someone cough deliberately.

"She said so too. And Your Highness, your schedule is packed after this. Please award her the permit right away."

"Clive, don't rush. It's rude to her since she came all this way, right?"

"But..."

"It's fine since I properly changed my schedule. And, I'm more concerned about Cordelia if she is injured."

Clive.

When Cordelia heard that name, she remembered that she had heard it from Cyrus.

(If I'm not mistaken, he was investigating the Queen candidates, Marquis Eames's...! So Clay is Clive-sama?)

Glasses, long hair and a crease between his eyebrows. Clive, who seemed to be very serious, gave Cordelia an impression that he was the complete opposite of Vernoux. From the way he rebuked Sylvester, it was evident that he wasn't welcoming her at all. His argument with Sylvester, which was loud enough to be heard from outside, was probably because of who the Prince had an audience with.

(He glared at me straight away, and has a bad impression of me... Well, I even feel like he sees me as an enemy, but that might be convenient for me.)

If Clive-sama wants me to leave quickly, then it matches my purpose. If so, then rather than just having to hope, it would be easier for my wish to come true if I create a situation where he has to drive me out.

Cordelia thought and looked straight at Sylvester.

"I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your concern. However, even though I am immature, I am from the Pameradia House. I'm afraid of what others will think if I bother you with something like this. I can visit the doctor myself if the pain doesn't go away."

"But..."

"If you are that worried, then I can show her to the doctor's office. So, please give her the permit as soon as possible."

Cordelia grasped her fist inside at Clive's offer.

Yay! Now I can go home!

It's self-interest, but if Vernoux-sama created this situation as the outcome, even though I was made to look uncool, I couldn't help but be grateful.

Cordelia, who had calmed down a little, felt strangely satisfied at the same time.

(It's certainly no wonder that ladies are attracted to the Prince.)

If a boy with a soft demeanour and was so considerate is the Prince, he would only leave people with good impressions. Cordelia would want to be involved with someone who acts more gentlemanly than he was in the game if she didn't have that terrible memory. Even so, he was a person who the current Cordelia feared and wanted to avoid, and he made her want to cower. It could already be called a strong reaction.

(Even if 『Cordelia』 was just suffering the consequences of her actions, I shouldn't get involved with him. I won't be able to recover if I make a blunder.)

I don't want to die yet. I can't get involved with him.

On the one hand, it won't be a problem if I warm up to him. On the other, there will still be people who doubt me, like Clive-sama, even if I distance myself from him.

(Even... even if I don't talk to His Highness, there may be people who believe that I'm harassing the heroine because of jealousy.)

If that happens, there's a risk that the Clydereines, her family, will confront me, and it's highly likely that I will cause trouble for my family. Also, it's possible that those who feel adverse to the Pameradia House will try to trap us so that they can eliminate us. As a result, death may be the only thing that can be avoided, but that's not the outcome I want.

(... I really shouldn't get close to Prince Sylvester after all.)

I have begun making my own territory through the mobile library and tea parties, but I can't stop what others say. It's almost impossible to completely deny strange rumours.

But it's not like I'll meet the Prince daily after this.

"... Please wait a little."

Sylvester said and went straight to the desk at the back of the room. He took two tiny boxes from on top of the table and returned to where Cordelia was.

"Here you are. Congratulations."

"I will look at it."

Inside the box was a small square dark blue glass plate. On the surface of the glass, written in white letters, was her permit to enter the Big Bookcase.

(This is... I wonder if this is a magic tool that works like a security release.)

The plate was attached to a long silver chain that could be worn around the neck. *It won't look good with dresses, but it's useful for researchers.*

"Please bring this with you when you enter the Big Bookcase. Be careful not to lose it."

"Certainly. Thank you very much."

"... You've handed her the permit. Then, I'll see her off."

Clive's voice sounded sharp in contrast to Sylvester's calm voice, and it would typically offend a lady, but those words were salvation for Cordelia.

"Thank you very much, Eames-sama. I'm sorry for troubling you."

Clive frowned for a moment at Cordelia, who was smiling, but immediately stopped.

"I'll leave it to you, Clive."

"Yes."

"I actually wanted to talk to you more... This is really disappointing."

Sylvester said, and Cordelia desperately tried to stop her face from stiffening.

"You wanted to talk to me?"

"Yes. For example... Like, how did you come up with edible paper? I'm interested in the concept."

Sylvester was probably praising Cordelia. However, if only the words were clipped out, then it would sound like she was an odd lady who wanted to eat paper.

However, Cordelia couldn't say that it was because of her memories from her previous life, so she answered with a smile.

"It's not good if you hold back and the pain gets worse. It's disappointing, but I'll see you soon."

"Thank you very much for your time. Please excuse me."

Cordelia curtsied while thinking, *I hope there won't be a next time* and left the room with Clive.

She finally felt the weight lift from her shoulders.

Act 47: Entering the Big Bookcase

A short distance away from the prince's room, Cordelia called out to Clyde who was walking in front of her.

"Clyde-sama, you said you would take me to the doctor's office, but it's fine after all. It doesn't hurt that much anymore."

Clyde, who stopped and turned around, scowled.

"It'll be troublesome if you say it hurts later."

"I won't. Also, if it does hurt later, then I can see a doctor at home. They won't investigate much if I say it was an unfortunate accident."

Cordelia was shocked at Clyde's unapproachable attitude. She had used his idea to leave Sylvester, but she thought that his preconceptions were quite biased. He still faithfully took her to the doctor's office, even though he was treating her like that, but she felt that he was treating her too much like a bad person.

However, no matter what he thought, she really didn't need the doctor's office. Rather, for Cordelia, there was a possibility that going to the doctor's office would cause a situation she was trying to avoid.

"For example... if I get treated at the doctor's office, then Marquis Flantheim might be informed of my injury. I'd feel awful if the Marquis were to worry about me."

Clive moved his eyebrows at those words.

For Cordelia, however, she was more worried about Elvis hearing about it than worrying Marquis Flantheim, and Clive also seemed to have realised something.

"... But, I can't go straight back to His Highness."

"If that's the case, then why don't you show me the way to the Big Bookcase?"

Indeed, if he were to return straight away then it would seem unnatural.

In that case, Cordelia said a wish that was just right for killing time. She only knew how to get from the east gate to where she was now.

However, Clive hesitated again.

(One more push.)

Clive still didn't seem convinced, but if he showed hesitation, then she still had plenty of chances to convince him.

"Clive-sama, you said you would take me to the doctor's office, but you didn't say that you would take me to see the doctor."

"..."

"So, it would be fine if we just pass the doctor's office."

“You say things like Vernoux-dono.”

“...”

Cordelia forced herself to smile but didn't know how to reply to Clive's remark, since it was clear that he was angry at Vernoux. His words stated that he didn't get along well with Vernoux. She could neither confirm nor deny that because she didn't want to pick a fight with him. She knew that she had freedom, and she hoped that she wasn't as free as Vernoux.

However, if he says that he doesn't get along well with Vernoux, then Cordelia was the same.

“... Well, fine.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Ah, let me tell you one thing. His Highness rarely visits the Big Bookcase. Even if he does, he does it early in the morning or late at night.”

It sounded like a warning, “He's not someone you can meet.” However, Cordelia smiled from the bottom of her heart at the unexpectedly useful piece of information. She could spend time at ease in the Big Bookcase.

“Then, I'll be able to concentrate on the books too.”

However, Cordelia, who had spoken that out of relief, panicked a little because she might have misspoken. It was a remark which sounded as if the Prince was a disturbance, depending on who heard it. Then, that would be a bit rude.

“...”

Luckily, Clive looked suspicious but didn't say anything. He began to walk again.

(I wonder if he took it as a joke...)

Cordelia stroked her chest as she stared at his back and followed after him.

He looked annoyed from beginning to end, but he passed the doctor's office, headed to the main gate and guided Cordelia to the Big Bookcase.

They didn't talk about anything in particular along the way, but he seemed to have a methodical personality since he took the trouble to show her the way from the main gate. He wasn't courteous, but she was grateful that he had shown her the way so she wouldn't be troubled later.

However, she felt that his back was saying, “Don't talk to me,” so she couldn't convey those words to him. She felt uncomfortable with just opening her mouth, so she decided to tell him everything at the end.

(More importantly, he took the trouble to show me around. I have to find landmarks.)

The Big Bookcase was located in a deeper place than Cordelia had thought.

All the buildings inside the castle looked the same, and she was uneasy wondering whether she would find something that would help her remember her location. There weren't many landmarks, but she

frantically looked around for distinctive things such as trees or decorations. It would look bad if she got lost the next time she visited the castle. She was sure that Ronnie would be with her the next time she visited, and she didn't want to show him anything pathetic.

(And, if I get lost, then... it might foreshadow a terrible event.)

I've seen the sticky situation 『The Lost Girl Encounters the Prince』 in novels many times in my previous world. It's enough that such a thing happens in novels. It definitely can't be reproduced. So, I should eliminate any possibility of me getting lost.

While thinking that to herself, she could understand the story itself.

If someone helps you when you're troubled, then they would surely look dazzling.

(I played the game where 『Cordelia』 had appeared in my previous life because I was interested in seeing a scene like that...)

However, I didn't play a lot of love games in my previous life.

Because in the middle of the game, I was like a protector who was watching over the Heroine's happiness, and suddenly thought 『What would I do if that was me? 』, then an indescribable and embarrassing feeling swelled up within me. 『I'm not an innocent person like this Heroine, so what am I thinking?!』 I don't know how many times I rebuked myself... having said that, I played it to my heart's content. But I sometimes felt anguished by it, so it was hard to purchase a new game. I had similar symptoms from novels and comics, but the impact of games with voices were exceptional.

(But that's right. If I do get lost, and someone other than His Highness treats me kindly, then I might want to talk to him more.)

When she thought that, her cheeks and mouth moved unnaturally.

(No, stop it. What am I thinking? I can't have rumours floating around saying that the daughter of the Pameradia House has no sense of direction!)

"Pameradia-jou, what are you thinking about?"

"I'm sorry. I was looking for a landmark along the way."

Cordelia replied, innocuously at the suspicious Clive. *He'd been walking earnestly with his back faced towards me for some time. When did he turn around? Was I that distracted that I didn't even notice him turn around?* Cordelia reflected.

Clive moved his eyebrow at Cordelia's reply.

"This is certainly a hard place to find for someone who has only been here once."

"Yes."

"You don't need to put up a useless show if you don't know where to go. Just quickly ask someone for directions."

"... You're right."

Clive said, a little snippily, turned around, and began to walk again.

(Indeed, I have no choice but to ask others before I get lost.)

It would feel shameful for a moment, but I might cause trouble for others if I continue to loiter. It's not strange for an outsider to ask for directions in the first place, and it's not humiliating to ask before I get lost... While Cordelia determined that, an independent building that looked like a chapel entered her view.

Cordelia concluded that the building was the Big Bookcase since Clive was headed straight towards it.

There were two guards stationed at the entrance of the Big Bookcase, but as soon as Clive said a few words, they gave way. Cordelia followed after Clive and approached the door.

“If you hold the permit you’ve just received over this pattern, the door will open.”

“Thank you very much.”

Apparently, the permit is a magic tool after all.

When Cordelia held the permit up to the pattern as she was instructed to, the heavy door slowly opened.

(This is the first time I've seen an automatic door in this world.)

The royal castle has some unusual techniques, she admired while walking inside.

There weren't any books as soon as she entered the door, but rather a long corridor. *I'll be able to see new books once I walk through this corridor* ——— her expectations rose while thinking about Elvis.

(Otou-sama made me a greenhouse which this royal castle doesn't have, even though they have this excellent door mechanism.)

She respected Elvis once more while thinking, *I have to be more motivated since I received something like that*, and the sound of the door closing came from behind her, so she turned around.

“Huh?”

Clive wasn't in the building yet.

Does this mean I can't go on, if Clive-sama isn't here?

Cordelia was a little confused, but the door opened again after a short while, and Clive entered. In his hand was a permit with a different colour than the one Cordelia had. He had to get it re-authenticated.

I have to be careful when I come here with Ronnie, if each person has to be authenticated, Cordelia thought as she asked Clive.

“Eames-sama, your permit is a different colour from mine, isn't it?”

He probably hadn't submitted anything at the competition show. Still, does he have a permit for business reasons because he serves His Highness?

Cordelia asked lightly, but Clive frowned deeply.

“This is a temporary passage pass. It’s not for browsing books like the one you hold.”

“Can you not read books, even though you have permission to enter?”

“I’ve never been told that it’s prohibited, but I don’t have the qualifications to read them.”

Clive clearly declared and continued with a firm tone.

“There aren’t any confidential documents here, but it’s a place for the royal family to browse their private collection. Please understand this.”

“Of course, I know.”

When Cordelia replied, Clive began to guide her again.

Cordelia’s tension increased as they walked down the corridor, step by step.

Soon after, Cordelia reached a room filled with books.

It was filled with bookshelves crammed with books and was a place befitting of the name 『Big Bookcase』. The bookshelves were much higher than a person, and she could see ladders and stepladders for getting books all over the place.

Cordelia was speechless at the scene, which far exceeded her expectations.

“The upper floors and the basement are the same, but there are restrictions for taking some books out. Ask a librarian for more information. If you want to look for books alone, then there’s a guide map over there.”

“...”

“Pameradia-jou?”

“I’m sorry. I was overwhelmed.”

Cordelia, who was absolutely surprised, couldn’t say anything else. She had really received a precious privilege. Her feelings of gratitude towards Vernoux, who had recommended the competition show, and Ronnie, who had completed the product, became stronger.

“Eames-sama, thank you very much for guiding me here. I’ll take a little tour before going home.”

But, Clive frowned.

“Is it inconvenient for me to be here?”

“No, not really. But, you’re busy, aren’t you?”

She had asked for guidance, but she felt bad if she asked him to accompany her for longer. His guidance role should be over. But, Clive looked displeased.

“That doesn’t have anything to do with you.”

“Then, I have nothing else to say. I’ll have a look around.”

She gradually grew used to Clive’s way of speaking, and thought, *can’t he talk differently even if it’s to someone he’d just met for the first time.*

(If he does have a methodical personality, then it wouldn’t be strange for him to try and get to know the person he’s talking to. Instead, he’s trying to get rid of the danger to His Highness, I’m afraid he’s going to be annoying with his wrong impression.)

It’s not like I want to leave a unique impact on him, but he would think there’s meaning behind my words no matter what I say. Cordelia dropped her shoulders. It doesn’t feel very good. I want to avoid ending up in a predicament because he has some misunderstandings about my relationship with the Prince.

(But, on the contrary, it’s convenient for him to observe me... right?)

I don’t know what I did to make him have a bad impression of me, but I should better his impression of me by a little bit by acting in a way that won’t make him think I’m planning something like I had in front of His Highness Sylvester. I don’t care how long he watches me to clear my concerns. I don’t have anything to feel guilty about, and Clive shouldn’t have caused harm to the in-game 『Cordelia』.

With that in mind, she looked around and approached the guide that Clive had been talking about before.

(The books on plants are on the first basement floor?)

She checked her destination on the map, memorised it, and rushed a little towards the stairs. Clive followed after Cordelia while maintaining a short distance.

Like the first floor, the basement was filled with many books.

And the plants corner was arranged in an easy to understand way; ornamental plants shelf, wild grasses shelf, and trees and shrubs shelf.

First, Cordelia chose a book from that selection and flipped through it. Then, she returned it to the shelf and took another book. She repeated that process several times.

(The contents are a little different, but it seems that the books my family has on plants are also excellent.)

The Big Bookcase has an overwhelming amount of books in other fields, but for plants, the Pameradia collection is just as wonderful... The moment she thought that.

“... Clove?”

Cordelia, who had stopped turning the pages, widened her eyes at the nostalgic herb name. She steadily looked at the picture of the tree drawn next to the name and the drawing of the leaves. *There's probably no mistake. This is the same Clove that I know, which I haven't been able to confirm exists here.*

(Of course, I won't know until I get my hands on the real herb...)

Clove was the main ingredient in herbal medicine, and was called caryophyllus clove in Japan.[1]

Because its scent could still be strongly smelled from a hundred miles away, it was called the hundred-mile incense or caryophyllus clove. *It often appeared in history in my previous world.*

For example, in China's Han Dynasty, the ministers would hold the clove in their mouth to perfume their breath during audiences with the emperor, and some say that in the Age of Discovery, the Spanish king ordered the explorer, Magellan, to make a voyage to secure routes for cloves.

When she learnt about the Age of Discovery in school, she heard that they had specially picked pepper out of all the spices, and its value was the same as gold, and honestly, she was surprised to find out that clove was ten times more valuable than pepper in Europe at that time.

(I'm sure that cloves were only produced in Maluku Islands in those days, and the price was high because of its rarity... Did I remember correctly?)

Such cloves were popular amongst royalty and nobles and were served at the end of parties with sugary sweets, before the spice boom.

There were many other things, including records of it being used to prevent rust on Japanese swords, but in the age that Cordelia lived, most people knew the scent from dental clinics, due to the clove oils.

If such a clove exists in this world, then I want to confirm its existence first. Cordelia thought as she read where it grew and was surprised.

“This is... part of Nirupama-obaasama's fief.”

I can't believe that cloves grow in Nirupama-obaasama's fief!

Cordelia couldn't help but think.

Weltoria, where Nirupama rules, is a relatively warm area located to the southeast of the royal capital, but the temperature wasn't as high as Maluku Islands.

(However, even in the mountains near the royal capital, seasonal plants grow all year round due to the magic in the earth, so it's not weird if there's a place influenced by magic in her fief.)

For the time being, I want to confirm this with Nirupama-obaasama the next time I see her. No, I should send her a greeting letter before I meet her. She might not know about cloves themselves, but if I ask her about it, then she might think about it as some kind of benefit instead of a request from her niece. She's a lover of my essential oils. I'm sure she'll investigate this for me.

"It might be difficult to turn it into a good business opportunity, like in the Age of Discovery, but I can probably increase my essential oil variations..."

She said and suddenly realised.

She had been staring at the books and talking to herself like she did in her home's library, but she wasn't alone.

Dammit, she thought, as she slowly turned her face towards the direction where Clive was standing.

Clive remained silent as he stared at Cordelia.

"I'm sorry, was I a little noisy?"

Clive looked offended since the beginning, so she didn't know if he thought she was noisy right now. However, he stared at her silently and made her feel uncomfortable.

"... There's no one else here."

However, his reply was quiet, albeit unfriendly.

Does that mean I don't have to worry about it? I'm not quite sure, but he didn't caution me for the time being, so I don't have to worry about it.

(I have to be careful, so he doesn't think I'm a noisy person.)

Cordelia noted. She read through the clove description and returned the book to the shelf. The book didn't have any useful information on cloves and treated them as trees and scrubs.

I might be able to find more details about cloves if there are books on plants in Weltoria. She thought as she looked up at the shelves, and found a book spine that looked like something that fit that description.

"..."

She wasn't afraid of high places, but she didn't want others to see her climb a ladder in a dress, and it could look as if she was dirtying her dress.

Cordelia pondered while hesitating, and decided to give up this time. She was afraid of asking Clive to get it for her. *It's disappointing, but I don't mind reading it at a later day. I can come back soon.*

"Thank you very much. I'll go home now."

"I see. Then, this way."

That was all Clive said before he turned his back. *It seems like he's going to show me the way back, but judging from his attitude thus far, he probably thinks that I'll return to where the Prince is. However, it's a blessing no matter what his reasons are.*

"Thank you very much."

"It's fine. Anyway, why do you think I'm from the Eames House? I don't think we've ever met before."

Cordelia was surprised that Clive had continued with a question because she thought he was just going to give her a brief reply. She recalled that he certainly hadn't introduced himself.

"Because His Highness called your name. I heard that the Eames son is serving by his side. I apologise for calling you that on my own."

"Where did you hear about that?"

"At the tea party hosted for the ladies. I attend them sometimes with my aunt."

To Clive, who kept on asking questions, Cordelia hid the fact that she had also heard about him from Cyrus. However, when she thought that he was questioning her in detail, an unpleasant possibility suddenly crossed her mind.

(Clive-sama thinks I'm aiming for the seat of the Queen. In other words, he thinks I'm obsessed with power, doesn't he? If so, perhaps I can see Clive-sama as a husband candidate for when the Crown Prince is useless, and so he considers me as a dangerous person?)

No, that's too crazy.

That was how Cordelia thought, but the possibility wasn't zero.

(If he has such doubts, then I understand why he's so persistent. I'm sure Clive-sama wants to understand people who he considers as dangerous.)

However, if it was precisely like Cordelia imagined, then it was a big misunderstanding.

It's fine if he misunderstands, but it's an extremely troublesome situation. I want to change the topic quickly, but I can't find anything to talk about this quickly... When she thought that, she recalled a question she had.

"Come to think of it, why does Vernoux-sama call you Clay-sama?"

Even though she knew that Clive served by Sylvester's side, she couldn't make the connection between Clive and Clay. It may be a nickname, but Clive and Vernoux didn't look like they got along at all. Vernoux probably saw Clive as a friend...

"I don't know."

"... I see."

Clive replied to Cordelia's question as if he was discarding it.

She didn't know if it was because he was uncomfortable with the name or because she said Vernoux's name.

However, when she mentioned Vernoux's name, she came up with another way to show that she wasn't interested without saying Clive's name.

"Clive-sama, please listen. It's a private matter, but Vernoux told me that Otou-sama looked scary today and seemed like he was angry."

"Did something happen?"

"I think that Otou-sama is a very calm and wonderful man. When I was younger, I troubled him by saying 『I want to marry someone like Otou-sama』. And yet, Vernoux-sama was rude, wasn't he?"

Elvis had been unresponsive when Cordelia made that remark when she was four years old, so it might be a bit misleading to say it like that, but it wasn't a complete lie. She heard from Hans that Elvis had been troubled inside, and her dreams were also real. However, even if she deducted those factors, she knew that it sounded like a questionable remark.

(But it can't be helped. If things continue like this, then we won't be able to talk.)

It's convenient for me if Clive thinks that I'm unsuitable to be Queen; and I can turn my eyes away if he only made a few rude remarks. However, others might misunderstand and think that there's a problem with my attitude if he treats me any colder than this.

She thought. *I need him to change his opinion of me after all.*

(If I declare that I like men like Otou-sama, then it would show that I'm not interested in Clive-sama or Sylvester-sama.)

For Cordelia, it would be enough if Clive understood that she wasn't a dangerous person, and wasn't a Queen candidate.

However, Cordelia's remark seemed too surprising for Clive. He widened his eyes large enough for the crease to disappear from between his brows and whispered.

"You have really weird tastes."

His tone was clearly different from before and didn't seem harsh.

Cordelia desperately tried to keep her smile and stop her face from twitching when the cautious voice from before sounded a little worried, or sympathetic.

(Clive-sama said I was like Vernoux-sama, but isn't he just like Vernoux-sama!?)

Honestly, saying that I have weird tastes... Just what on earth does everyone think of my Otou-sama?

Cordelia couldn't help but think.

†1 Eugenia Caryophyllus, oil from the leaves is known to have antiseptic properties.



On her way home from the Big Bookcase, Cordelia bought some souvenirs from the confectionery store.

She bought some to give to Emina and Lara as thanks for helping her get dressed today, but it looked so delicious, that she also bought some for Ronnie and herself.

She went straight to the greenhouse after she got home because she had to give Ronnie the permit as well.

In the greenhouse, Lara and Ronnie were enjoying tea.

“Oh, Ojou-sama. Welcome home!”

“Oh, welcome home, Ojou-sama. I heard about it, but you’re dressed up.”

“I’m back, Lara and Ronnie. Were you having a tea party?”

“Yes, would you like to join us, Ojou-sama?”

Lara invited as she stood out and pulled the chair that Cordelia always sat on.

However, Cordelia smiled wryly and shook her head.

“Thank you, but I only came by to give you something. They’re souvenirs.”

“Yaay!”

“Yay!”

Lara and Ronnie cheered at almost the same time. This part of the student and teacher were exactly alike.

Lara received the package from Cordelia and was fascinated in front of her.

“But it’s really nice. The dress is also nice, but your hair is beautiful. I want to be able to tie my hair up beautifully like you. I like the usual you, but it’s also nice to see a change every once in a while. I wonder if I should get Emina to teach me”

She added as she placed herself behind Cordelia and stared at her hair again.

On the other hand, Ronnie didn’t seem very interested, and he tilted his head while opening the sweets package.

“If you’re that interested in hair, then why don’t you grow yours out, Lara? Then, you can practice on your own hair, right?”

“Ronnie... You haven’t noticed that Lara has been growing her hair out?”

“Huh? Oh, come to think of it, Lara has been tying her hair up lately.”

Ronnie’s surprise made it clear that he hadn’t noticed that Lara was growing her hair out.

“Jeez. It’s fine for you to notice a change in your cute student, right? Though, Lara has been growing her hair out for two years now.”

“Huh? But her hairstyle doesn’t make it noticeable even if she grows it out...”

However, Ronnie looked away because he didn’t think it was a good situation despite his words.

“I tie it up in a ponytail when I’m working. It doesn’t get in the way.”

“No, see. You tie it to the back, so you can’t see it, right?”

Lara sighed deeply at Ronnie, who was still averting his gaze.



“Well, it’s fine. This is Ronnie, after all. But didn’t you know, Ronnie? It’s completely different when you do your hair and when others do it for you. Just because I grow my hair, doesn’t mean I’ll be good at doing it up straight away.”

“No, rather than not knowing, my hair’s been done before. It was scary. Ah, whatever. Ojou-sama don’t laugh.”

“I’m sorry, it’s funny.”

Cordelia tried to shake off the image of Ronnie with his hair done up and coughed.

“Anyway, here. This is the Big Bookcase permit.”

After receiving the permit from Cordelia, Ronnie held it in the air before his eyes and gazed at it.

“Be careful not to lose it.”

“Ahaha, I understand.”

“Yes. Those are Prince Sylvester’s words.”

“Eh, ah, yes. I’ll be careful. But it’s a terrible thing when I think about it.”

I don’t think he would lose it even if I don’t say anything, but it’s easy to understand Ronnie as he holds the permit with more caution than before. He’ll put it in a locked drawer as soon as he gets back to his room.

“I also heard how to enter the Big Bookcase, so let’s go together once. How about tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow? Okay, I don’t have any problems with that.”

“And I could only go to the office for half the day today, so I want to go there as well. Do you mind if we visit after we go to the Big Bookcase?”

“Okay. I’ll put that on my schedule.”

Alright, now Ronnie should be able to reach the book that I couldn’t get today. However, it’s in a difficult place to find, so let’s think about outfits that are easy to move in, Cordelia thought, and Lara sighed deeply.

“Aah. I also want to go out with Ojou-sama. It’s not fair that you always go out with Ronnie. And, I could also help you out if I have the knowledge. Then, I might have received that.”

“Lara, you can just make something too. You don’t have to rush.”

“Do you think I could make something easily? I had so much trouble with the pencil.”

“Then, why don’t you submit that pencil next year?”

“The pencils have already been circulating since last year. Wouldn’t it be too late to submit it next year? It’s uncool if I don’t submit a new item and surprise them.”

Lara, who said that, lifted her eyebrows. It was challenging to obtain the permit, but this was also because of Lara’s pride.

"I don't think it's limited to new ideas, but I think it's good if it hasn't been circulated in the royal capital yet. You want to surprise them? You're being influenced by Ojou-sama."

Ronnie shrugged lightly as he muttered.

"Well, I'll help out if you find something. I'll find something useful, even if I have Lara."

"Argh! I'll definitely think of something that will surprise you, Ronnie! Promise!"

Lara's words were also filled with anger, but Ronnie didn't care.

"Yeah, okay. By the way, have you finished yesterday's assignment?"

"You said that was due tomorrow, didn't you?"

"Then, you better finish it before you aim for the permit."

Lara averted her gaze, as if her feistiness from before was a lie, and suddenly stood up as if she had come up with something.

"I've already finished work for today, right? I'm going to the library for a little bit!"

Then, she quickly left the greenhouse. She had probably thought of something to finish Ronnie's assignment. Her attitude took a complete change from when she was enjoying tea.

"You're really good at getting her hyped up. You've completely gotten used to being a teacher."

"Ahaha. But I regret it a little. I hope she doesn't think of anything ridiculous."

"Oh my, that's what I'm looking forward to."

Cordelia laughed at the words that sounded neither serious nor like a joke, and Ronnie dropped his shoulders.

"You think of it as someone else's problem."

"I don't think of you or Lara as strangers, you know?"

"I know... So, how was it? Your impressions of visiting the castle that you didn't seem to want to visit."

He was teasing her.

Cordelia smiled firmly at the unexpected question.

"... Well, I have this, so it's fine. The Big Bookcase is wonderful. The Big Bookcase that is."

It shouldn't be a problem if I go to the castle for the Big Bookcase. Clive-sama also said that the Prince doesn't come to the Big Bookcase, so I'm safe.

"Those words sound questionable. Ah, but the son of the Eames House serves His Highness, so you'll be unwilling to visit the castle, Ojou-sama."

"Why?"

"Why? Isn't there a rumour stating that Marquis Eames and Master are on bad terms?"

“Eh, really?”

Cordelia widened her eyes because that was the first time she’d heard it, and Ronnie tilted his head at her reaction.

“At least, it was famous in the Academy. Apparently, that calm Marquis Eames only raises his voice at Earl Pameradia.”

“His son seemed healthy.”

“Well, I’ve never met the Marquis before, and it’s only a rumour. In the first place, Master doesn’t have many good friends.”

Ronnie, who had said that, also had few friends in school, but the rumour must have been pretty famous for him to have heard of it.

However, something else worried her more than that.

“Don’t tell that to Otou-sama even as a joke, okay? Especially the last thing.”

“I know. I won’t tell him! Scary, scary.”

I don’t think he’ll slip up considering he’s going pale, but Otou-sama does have friends: Zeke, the substitute feudal lord, his sister-in-law, Nirupama-obaasama, and Marquis Flantheim. The rest are mostly acquaintances, so I don’t know how many friends he has...

“Well, it doesn’t matter if he has a lot of friends or not, I think Master is a good person.”

“I’m happy as his daughter if you think that way. Now, I’ll go back to my room before I get my dress dirty. You can finish today after you clean up the tea party. If you’re free, then please explain Lara’s assignment to her.”

“Thank you very much.”

Cordelia parted with Ronnie and left the greenhouse.

On the way back to her room, she met Emina at the entrance.

“Welcome home, Ojou-sama. You must be tired after coming back, but Isma-sama has returned and is asking for Ojou-sama.”

“Huh? Onii-sama has? Thanks, I’ll go see him right away.”

Today was the day Isma would be coming home, but it was still reasonably early.

How rare, she thought as she gave Emina’s gift to her and headed straight to Isma’s room. She knocked on Isma’s door and waited for permission before entering.

“I’m sorry to keep you waiting, Onii-sama.”

“Sorry. You’ve just returned home.”

“That’s you also, right? Thank you for your hard work, like always.”

Isma narrowed his eyes at Cordelia's words and laughed.

"Thanks. Anyways, you look more amazing than usual. It's cute."

"Thank you very much."

"You got hyped up and visited the castle, didn't you?"

"Oh my, do you know about that?"

I didn't tell Isma-oniisama that I was visiting the castle, so Otou-sama probably told him. But I don't think he would go out of his way to tell Onii-sama that I was visiting the castle; he doesn't have time to do that.

Cordelia tilted her head, and Isma looked a little troubled.

"A messenger came from His Highness. You got hurt?"

"No, I just stumbled a little. I think His Highness knows this too..."

"I see, that's good then. I thought you would be fine from what I heard."

"Mm, did you perhaps... come home early because of that?"

If that were the case, then the excuse I used to escape from his office has become a nuisance, Cordelia reflected with mixed feelings, and Isma lightly shook his head.

"You don't have to worry about it. I had a day off today, so I wanted to come home earlier. I'm glad I got the chance to go home."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I also finished the job that I wanted to do, so don't worry."

If so, then there are no problems... Cordelia felt that just falling down could have an effect on many levels, and decided to be more careful in the future.

However, someone else worried her, since Sylvester had sent a messenger to Isma.

"Onii-sama, does Otou-sama know...?"

She was half-joking when she had used it as an excuse on Clive, but it wouldn't be good if her father really found out.

Isma smiled wryly at Cordelia's question. She knew what he was thinking.

"Don't worry. Fortunately, father seems to have gone out on an inspection today. When a message comes to me, it means that father hasn't received it yet, so I told them not to tell him."

"I'm glad."

"Father would be anxious if he hears that you've been injured. Very."

He informed her just in case, and Cordelia was relieved to hear that Isma had realised the same thing she had. She felt terrible for Elvis if he heard that his daughter had been injured at the castle, since he

had come home to take her there because he was worried. And, it was unsightly, so she didn't want him to know that she had tumbled.

"So... you have a package addressed to you. I heard it's His Highness's get-well present."

"Huh? From His Highness?"

"Yeah. Apparently, they're baked goods."

It's too much.

That was her first impression. Her second thoughts were, *even though I don't need them.*

"Onii-sama, I really only hurt for a second, and I'm not hurt..."

"But, I can't return what His Highness has given. They're sweets, and His Highness also said, 『Please give them to her secretly』, so just accept them."

Cordelia couldn't refute what Isma had said.

(Well, I can't just send back His Highness's gift, now can I?)

She understood in her mind, but she still didn't want it.

But, Isma would be troubled if she kept on being unreasonable.

(Even if it's the same gift, I'm happy with the ones that Gille-sama sends me sometimes...)

Can a different sender really change one's feelings this much? But I have no choice but to accept it.

"... Then, I'll write him a thank you note. Can you give it to His Highness, Onii-sama?"

t was a thoughtful gift, even though Cordelia didn't want it. It was rude to accept it without replying. However, Isma shook his head a little at Cordelia's words.

"I don't think you need to do that. Even though it's a get-well present, it's not really good if the story leaks that His Highness sent a gift to a lady he isn't close to. And, I only meet His Highness alone by chance. That's why he said secretly."

Isma laughed.

Of course, Cordelia was grateful if she didn't need to thank him...

"But, wouldn't that be rude?"

I don't want to get involved with him, but I want to be polite as a person.

If I don't thank him, then it would seem like it's natural for me to receive it, and it's like I'm walking on the same path as 『Cordelia』 who fell to ruin.

Isma put his hand on his chin at Cordelia's words.

"But that's right. If you really want to thank him, then it's better if you ask the Flantheim's son. He probably meets with His Highness a lot, and you don't have to worry about him broadcasting it."

"..."

If possible, I don't want to rely on Vernoux-sama for this.

I'm still asking him to send letters to Gille-sama for me, and I want to avoid giving him more materials to tease me about. Also, this is related to His Highness Sylvester.

(But this is also his fault... He'll certainly avoid public gaze.)

In the first place, it wouldn't be strange if Vernoux-sama knew that he had sent me a get-well present. The only thing I have to worry about with him is that Clive-sama, who thinks of me as a 『Wicked Woman aiming for the Prince』 and puts his guard up around me, would find out... But he can probably avoid that too...

"... Yes."

I'd like to use other means if possible, but unfortunately, Onii-sama's proposal is more realistic.

However, even though she had decided to send a letter, she felt depressed thinking about what to write.

(It's just to express my thanks. It won't be a problem if I just write it formally. Or so I think, but...)

I'm used to writing letters, thanks to my correspondence with Gille-sama, and it's also thanks to the effort I've put into it since I was little. I'm confident that my writing wouldn't be embarrassing no matter who I write to, but I can't think of what to write straight away.

(Anyway, I definitely have to let him know that I'm not injured.)

If I don't let him know, then he might send another get-well present. But if I ask Vernoux-sama to deliver the letter, then he can testify my claim even if Sylvester-sama is worried about the condition of my injury.

Cordelia believed and decided to entrust the letter to Vernoux. She dropped her eyes on the sweets in her hand.

It must be delicious since they're sweets that this country's prince ate and chose.

However, I feel depressed when I think of it as a gift from Sylvester-sama even though the sweets have done nothing wrong.

"Onii-sama, would you like to eat them with me?"

Cordelia looked up, and Isma laughed.

"I don't mind. Will you recommend us tea to drink?"

"Okay."

Cordelia was glad that Isma was a good brother.

Isma always told her a lot of stories, so she should be able to get distracted even if she's eating sweets. If Isma had refused, then she could have asked Ronnie or Lara, but then she would have to hide the source of the sweets. If she slipped up by chance, then she would end up talking about when she tumbled, and she wanted to avoid that.

(I'm glad that Onii-sama was the one who received these. If Vernoux-sama had brought these sweets here, then I wouldn't even have time to think...)

Cordelia suddenly remembered Clive, who didn't have a good relationship with Vernoux.

"Onii-sama, I met Marquis Eames's son today. Has he always been... so spirited?"

"Oh, did you meet him because he serves His Highness? What did he say?"

Isma's reply to Cordelia's question, which she had asked gently, sounded as if he already had an idea of what had happened.

However, Clive had only acted cold towards her and hadn't said any offending words that had directly insulted her. Apart from him worrying about her taste in men.

"No, Vernoux-sama and Eames-sama... seem like friends who completely understand each other."

She wasn't sure how direct she should be, and her words went muddy. Isma smiled wryly.

"Oh... He's a serious child."

"Is that normal? And... oh yes. I want to ask you, have you ever heard the rumours about Marquis Eames and father being on bad terms?"

"I've heard a little."

She covered up the fact that she had just heard about this and answered. Isma nodded a little.

"It's pretty famous, but it's not so much about the Eames House and our house as it is about the relationships between the heads, so you don't have to worry about it much. In fact, I can keep my

distance away from the Marquis and his son, but I'm not firmly avoiding them, and it's not that I was told anything. They're just strangers."

"The son, as well?"

Contrary to Onii-sama's words, the way he treats them is obviously not the attitude one used towards someone whom they met for the first time, but is the way he receives them different from me? However, Cordelia wasn't particularly concerned, even though she had thought that, and Isma continued.

"Yeah. However, even though the relationship between the Marquis and father is bad, it's not about which one is in the wrong. Cordelia, you know that father got injured when he protected His Majesty, don't you? Many people said it was a merit at that time, but Marquis Eames got angry and said that the problem was that he had exposed His Majesty to danger."

"... I see."

"Having said that, I heard that they weren't on good terms since before that. As you know, father is a man of few words. And... Oh yes, you should remember that he isn't on good terms with the head of the Clydereine House either."

"Clydereine House?"

The voice that came out of Cordelia sounded like a question, but she was agitated inside. It was surprising to hear the Heroine's home, the Clydereine House, come out of Isma's mouth.

Cordelia had predicted that the Pameradia House and the Clydereine House weren't on good terms. Despite having the same privilege as Earl Houses, who contributed to the founding of the kingdom, they didn't interact with each other. And, the Heroine in-game had met the Prince at the market, and she was from an Earl House that had a terrible relationship with 『Cordelia's』 family.

"But that's a little different from the situation with Marquis Eames. Father tried too hard and outperformed Earl Clydereine's limelight, and he goes to the extremes because he considers father a rival; he has a lot of emotions."

Isma, who looked troubled, had chosen his words wisely. However, his explanation was a little different from what Cordelia knew from the game. She certainly remembered that it was the Pameradia side who snarled at the Clyderines.

"Well, they won't do you any harm directly, and the Marquis also talks to me. He's a bit aggressive... but, oh yes."

"What's wrong?"

Cordelia tilted her head at the sudden change in Isma's tone. Isma frowned and made a complicated expression that was hard to put into words.

"I'll tell you before I forget. Cordelia, a lot of people visit the castle. Most of them are serious people. I'm sure you'll get to know more people."

"Yes."

“However, there are exceptions. If someone strange talks to you, then don’t hesitate to talk to brother or me. You can... talk to father, but it’s better if you talk to brother or me rather than him.”

“Okay...?”

What the heck is he talking about?

Cordelia tilted her head and thought about the meaning behind his words.

My acquaintances will certainly increase. Not only in the Big Bookcase, but the people I pass on the way there might talk to me for some reason. And, since the other people work in the castle, I don’t think I would meet many suspicious people, but what the heck is this about if I should consult with my Onii-samas and not Otou-sama? With that in mind, Cordelia checked Isma’s expression again and noticed it.

(Pe-perhaps... is he warning me about not being tricked by the opposite sex?!)

No, but it should be... I’m still only 14 years old, Cordelia thought, but when she thought about it, Cyrus got engaged at a younger age than her, so age might not be a factor.

She didn’t know if they would speak to her, but she wasn’t a mild lady in the first place. She was aware that she had a way with words.

(I’m sure Onii-sama knows my personality, and, if something does happen, then I can just say Otou-sama’s name and smile. I think that has a strong effect too.)

Cordelia thought and realised something more important.

Oh, I’ll meet various people, unlike now.

“Onii-sama, that’s... Does that mean that I would have a wonderful encounter?”

Maybe, I’ll meet my future spouse?

Cordelia, who arrived at that thought, pressed her hand against her mouth. *I hadn’t even imagined that that opportunity would happen even in the distant future, don’t tell me that...*

“... Well, Ronnie will be there, so it’s fine.”

She felt like soaring in the sky but was brought back to reality by Isma’s whisper that was so quiet she nearly missed it.

(No, no. What on earth am I visiting the Big Bookcase for?)

But, when I think that he’s worried about those things, I feel like I’m going to join the ranks of adults soon in this world.

“Well, let’s have tea while we talk more. Cordelia, can I ask you to get some?”

“Of course.”

“And, can you not change your dress until father gets home?”

“No, father came to pick me up today, so he’s already seen it. If you’re asking me to make tea, then I’ll change my clothes before coming back here.”

“Father came to pick you up...”

Isma smiled and whispered.

◆◆◆◆◆

After dinner, Cordelia wrote a letter to Sylvester in her room.

The stationary that she was using wasn’t the one she usually used, but a plain one with the Pameradia House crest watermarked on it. She felt like she wasn’t used to either of these actions, but it couldn’t be helped.

(Later, I’ll get Otou-sama... No, Isma-oniisama to look over it.)

I think it’s okay for an individual, but the recipient was a member of the royal family. I can’t have anything rude in the letter, even if just by chance. I want to ask Otou-sama to look over it, but I’m hiding the cause of my injury in the first place, so I should ask Isma-oniisama.

(It’s shocking to receive a present from His Highness, but I can’t tell Otou-sama.)

It would be really troublesome if he misunderstands and thinks I’m thrilled to write this letter. I feel a bit uncomfortable keeping this from him, but I can’t talk to him about this.

“But, His Highness also said to do it 『secretly』, so I should obey him.”

Cordelia made excuses to herself and headed to Isma’s room with the letter she’d written.

“Hmm. I don’t think there are any problems with the letter. But, it’s like a business letter, it doesn’t sound like something a child wrote.”

Cordelia smiled at Isma’s words. *It seems like my thank you letter was completed in an ideal way.*

Cordelia, who had returned to her room again, wrote a letter to Vernoux. She asked him to send the enclosed letter to Sylvester. *Vernoux-sama probably still feels guilty, so he won’t make fun of me.* She sealed the letter with this wish.

Act 48: Each on their Guard

The next day, Cordelia, who had finished her lunch early, boarded the carriage with Ronnie and headed towards the Big Bookcase.

Today, after browsing books at the Big Bookshelf, she planned to visit her grandmother, Fulvia, a pharmacist. News had come that a medicinal herb that Cordelia wanted had arrived.

“Oh yes, I heard from Emina that a shop with delicious cake has been built, how about we go there before visiting Sensei?”

“That’s a great idea. Then, I have to use my head properly so I can eat those delicious sweets. I wonder what topic I should read about.”

Cordelia was a little surprised by Ronnie’s response. She thought he would look more forward to the cake, so it was surprising to hear him talk about the Big Bookcase instead of what type of cake he wanted to try.

(Ronnie might be looking forward to the Big Bookcase more than I expected. In that case, I shouldn’t get in his way because of my requests.)

Even though he’s acting as my guard, he shouldn’t need to stay by my side in the castle, much less the limited space in the Big Bookcase. I wanted him to get the book I wanted from yesterday, but Clive-sama isn’t by my side like yesterday, and if there aren’t many people in the library, then I should be able to climb the ladder and get it myself without anyone seeing. Also, I chose a dress that had a few decorations.

(It’s thanks to Ronnie that I was able to get the permit, so I should be flexible at times like this)

Hearing the carriage stop, Cordelia got a little hyped up.

“Now, let’s go.”

She visited the castle, which she had just visited yesterday, again.

Up until yesterday, she would have wanted to scream at this situation, but she felt surprisingly calm today.

(Until now, I didn’t know when I would encounter the Prince, but I wonder if I feel relieved because I heard he doesn’t come to the Big Bookcase much.)

It wasn’t like I wasn’t anxious at all, but I’m more excited about the knowledge that I can only obtain from here. And, although it’s different from my aim, Clive-sama is trying his best not to let Sylvester-sama and I meet.

(I felt Clive-sama’s hostility towards me withdraw towards the end, but I don’t think it’s changed favourably. He’s probably still on his guard against me.)

“Ojou-sama? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Oh, Ronnie, that’s the wrong direction.”

“We turn here,” Cordelia told Ronnie what she had learnt from Clive yesterday.

“I wish you would have told me earlier,” she felt she had heard, but she didn’t care.

After a short while, they arrived at the entrance. Cordelia explained how to use the permit to Ronnie, and they both entered the Big Bookcase.

“Oh. There’s a lot of books here. How long would it take to read them all?”

“Do you have that kind of hobby?”

Ronnie gave his unique impression while looking impressed. *They must have been the thoughts of a merchant’s son, but he is looking forward to reading any book from here.* Cordelia smiled wryly.

Ronnie, who had said such a thing, looked around and his voice gradually became livelier.

“If I get immersed in the books, then the day will be over in the blink of an eye.”

His expectations seem high after all. Cordelia was relieved to see that Ronnie had forgotten that she had said they would go eat sweets after this. *If he’s happy, then that’s great.*

“Ronnie, it’s your first time here today, so why don’t you go read the books you want?”

“Is that alright?”

“Yes. It’s a great opportunity.”

“Umm, but, Ojou-sama...”

“You don’t have to worry about me. I also have books I want to read.”

“That’s not it... Well, fine. Even Ojou-sama won’t be able to bring trouble here.”

“Hey, I can hear you?”

Cordelia didn’t worry about his slurred words, but apparently he was concerned about her behaviour.

(I wonder just what kind of hooligan he thinks I am.)

I’ve never plunged myself into anything... She thought, but thinking back, she did get into trouble sometimes. Although it hadn’t been voluntary, Ronnie’s concerns were spot-on considering the results.

Still, like Ronnie thought, no problem would occur if she doesn’t leave the Big Bookcase.

“I’m going down to the basement.”

“Okay. Then, I’ll look around here first before going down.”

They hadn’t decided on a time to meet up again, but they could predict what time they needed to gather since they were going to stop by the office later. They wouldn’t run out of books to read since there were so many of them.

Cordelia walked down the stairs. She thought, *if I didn’t have any plans, then it wouldn’t be bad to spend the whole day here,* as she walked towards the same bookcase as yesterday.

“I really wish I had more time.”

She muttered as she put her hands on the ladder in front of the bookcase she had reached.

She had never climbed a ladder since she had gotten this body, but she had played with playground equipment such as jungle gyms and monkey bars in her previous life. The hem of her skirt was a little annoying, but it wasn't impossible to climb the ladder with this on.

(Alright, I got it. But I'm also curious about the book next to it.)

The books are a little heavy, so I can damage them if I pile them up on top of each other, she thought as she picked up the first book and climbed down the ladder. She placed it on the nearest desk.

(Alright, one more time.)

She thought with enthusiasm as she put her foot on the ladder again. She didn't hesitate like before since this was the second time she was climbing it, and she was able to take the book in no time. When she was about to climb down, she heard footsteps approaching.

"Ronnie?"

He had said that he would come to the basement later, but she felt that it was still too early for him to be here. *Did something happen?* She wondered, and the person who had appeared was not Ronnie, but Clive who had his eyebrows knitted together.

Like the surprised Cordelia, Clive opened his eyes wide the moment he saw Cordelia.

(I thought no one would come... The me right now isn't very lady-like.)

It wasn't good to greet someone from the top of the ladder.

Cordelia held the book carefully and quickly climbed down the ladder.

"How do you do, Clive-sama."

She greeted him with dignity as if nothing had happened.

She also had a so-what attitude, *it's no use since he saw me climb the ladder.* Not being seen was the most desirable, but she could say with dignity, "Because this is the library." *Isn't he looking at me bashfully or like I've done something wrong?*

(That's right. I've been invited to this place as a researcher. As a researcher, I should be able to come up with an excuse for something like a ladder.)

However, in contrast to Cordelia, Clive's raised his voice.

"What on earth are you doing?!"

"What's wrong? You seem flustered."

"Of course, I would be... It's absurd, isn't it?"

Clive, who had quickly shortened the distance between him and Cordelia as he said this, put his feet vigorously on the ladder.

"What book do you need?"

“Huh? I’ve already taken all the books I want.”

“...”

She was grateful for the kind yet unexpected offer, but she already had no uses for the ladder. The crease between Clive’s eyebrows deepened, but Cordelia couldn’t do anything about that.

(But, he doesn’t loathe me.)

He might be a good-natured person, she thought as she held back her laughter. He might be displeased if she laughed at his kindness. I should act calmly.

“You’re pointing out that it’s dangerous, aren’t you? Thank you for your consideration.”

“Naturally. It would be intolerable if you fell and hurt yourself. It might end up like yesterday.”

“Thank you for your concern yesterday. Fortunately, it wasn’t a big deal.”

“Even so, you don’t know when you’ll get hurt again.”

Clive looked at her suspiciously, but Cordelia kept silent with a smile on her face.

“You really are like Vernoux-dono, but you should be careful about your behaviour as a lady. Wasn’t your servant given a permit as well? Is he not here today?”

“He didn’t come here as a servant, but as a researcher. As a researcher, I’m more like the apprentice, so I thought it would be a good idea to let him browse books on his own.”

“Not only is your taste in men weird, but your way of thinking is very free.”

Cordelia understood that he was calling her eccentric in a roundabout way.

However, she felt no hostility in his voice. He seemed stunned like yesterday.

“Can you not accept my way of thinking, Eames-sama?”

“I didn’t say it was bad.”

He had accepted it, but it probably wasn’t something behaviour he would praise since he hadn’t given a consensus answer.

Cordelia concluded that the ditch would get deeper if they kept on talking about this, so she quickly changed the topic.

“By the way, why are you here today, Eames-sama?”

Clive had called his permit a pass, and wouldn’t enter this place without a purpose.

Cordelia tilted her head and made a sour face.

“I’m looking for Vernoux-dono and His Highness because I didn’t see them. They’re mostly go to the garden, but I heard that you were here, so I came by thinking they would be here too.”

It seems I have to withdraw my previous remarks. I thought that the hostility that Clive-sama had towards me had faded, but it seems he still considers me as a dangerous person.

(Even so, it's not as bad as yesterday, and I'd be happy if he kept me away from His Highness.)

Was it that shocking for Clive-sama to learn that my type was someone like Otou-sama? In any case, it was convenient for me if he doesn't want me to get close to Sylvester-sama like now. Even if I were to encounter Sylvester-sama, I'm grateful that it seems like he would immediately let me withdraw.

However, Cordelia sympathised with Clive over one thing.

"You have it hard."

"..."

Thank you for your excellent work, Cordelia added in her mind.

It was really pitiful that she could tell everything even though he was silent.

"... You're a pretty talkative girl."

Clive said with a stiff expression and averted his gaze.

(I wonder if he's telling me that I shouldn't talk anymore.)

Cordelia looked at his awkward appearance and decided to stop talking about this topic. Although she had selfishly thought this, she was one of Clive's worries.

"I'm sorry, do you prefer quiet?"

Cordelia, who was a little distracted, joked, and Clive looked stunned.

"My type doesn't have anything to do with you. I just thought that you look like the Earl and Cyrus-dono, but you talk a lot. However, having said that, you're not modest like Isma-dono either."

"Oh my, have you talked to Otou-sama before?"

Even if she had only been half-listening to him, she had to be careful about this matter. If he had a problem with Elvis after having an actual conversation with him instead of because of rumours or the relationship between their parents, then she was curious as to why.

However, Clive frowned at Cordelia's question.

"Do you think the Earl would have anything to do with me? If he does, then he would just glare at me."

"Oh my, then you might be mistaken. Otou-sama and Cyrus-oniisama don't have many expressions. Otou-sama often makes a complicated face even when he's at home."

"If that Earl is your type, then you have a really rough type."

"Everyone has their own type, and they don't always look like that. Of course, I'm worried because they might be tired."

Cordelia only stated her true feelings even if he looked at her suspiciously. However, there are times when she thought he was being sarcastic, so she smiled a little and replied.

“Speaking of complicated faces, Clive-sama, you also make complicated faces often, don’t you? If you keep making those expressions, then you’ll have wrinkles between your brows even though you’re young.”

“That’s not true.”

“Really?”

Cordelia hadn’t met Clive for very long, but he always had a crease between his brows.

“Even if I do have such an expression, then it’s because of you right now.”

“Oh my, I’m sorry.”

That’s definitely not the only reason, she thought as she moved lightly and Clive sighed deeply.

“I can’t afford to be as relaxed as you. Even though I’m from a Marquis House, the third son has to quickly establish a clear position for himself...”

The words which he had muttered quickly were cut off halfway.

Cordelia tilted her head a little, and Clive looked bashful.

“I’m sorry please listen to me.”

She blinked at those awkward words and was at a loss on how to answer.

I thought that he plotted to keep undesirable people away from His Highness because of his cautious personality, but it doesn’t seem to be the only reason from his previous remark.

(But, it’s natural to think about protecting oneself.)

If I were in the same position as him, then I would look for a stable position too. Our positions are different, but I’m avoiding the Prince for my protection. Rather, what’s wrong with seeking a stable future?

(But, on the contrary, I think he’s capable of obtaining a stable future. If he wants His Highness to like him, then he shouldn’t warn His Highness and Vernoux-sama. It would be easier for him to overlook them.)

He’s faithful to his duties and doesn’t just act like a follower, and his fastidious appearance, which shows disgust for his own circumstances, is awkward but worthy of trust.

When she thought that, she became concerned that he frowned because he overthought things. Maybe, he’s not good at taking breathers, and his shoulders are too stiff? Wait, does he take any breathers in the first place?

“... What’s wrong?”

“Clive-sama, this may sound rude, but do you have any hobbies?”

“Hobbies? I don’t need them.”

“Then, how do you take a break?”

“Why do I need to use time for that?”

Cordelia twitched a little at the words that were clearly dismissing this topic.

I was going to get over the lowest hurdle and tell him that wasn't true no matter what, but he kicked me away.

(He doesn't take any breaks.)

I think people can have any hobby they want as long as it doesn't bother others. Even if one has a lot of shallow hobbies or focus on one, even if one isn't inclined to a hobby, that's easy to change, it's enough even if they just nap to alter their mood.

However, Clive-sama's reply implied that he didn't need to spend time on something like that. No, he had actually stated that.

“Clive-sama, it's important for people to take breaks.”

“Why?”

“If you don't take time to look after yourself, then you would overwork your body and mind, and your vision will become narrow. Clive-sama, you put too much strength into your shoulders, that's why your stiff shoulders are pretty bad, aren't they? It can also lead to headaches and insomnia.”

Clive winced a little at Cordelia's consecutive questions.

However, he was a strong-willed person who could lecture Sylvester. Clive immediately glared at Cordelia.

“Then, does the Earl also have a hobby?”

“Of course.”

“That Earl?”

“Clive-sama, who do you think Otou-sama is?”

No, I know that Otou-sama had horrible stiff shoulders before, but he relaxed with horse riding and swordsmanship. No, it might be an occupational disease, but they're definitely hobbies. She decided to declare.

“His Highness would be worried if you collapse. If you think hobbies are also efficient for work, then isn't it worth a try?”

Well, if his worries originate from Vernoux-sama and Sylvester-sama, then they need to change their behaviours... That was outside of Cordelia's control.

“...”

“Do you want to say something?”

“You said my vision is narrow, but do you know about this? Some say that you're a lady who consumes the treasures of the Earl.”

Cordelia was surprised at what he had suddenly said, but she immediately realised that it wasn't sarcasm. Clive wouldn't stir up trouble for someone he doesn't like.

(But I don't think he's just warning me. Perhaps, the reason why he's keeping me away from His Highness is that I'm a 『High-cost lady』 who wants to approach His Highness, and he was afraid that His Highness's reputation would fall.)

If I think back to our first conversation, then it's highly likely that Clive-sama imagined that I was a lady with a bad reputation. This is probably his way of confirming this.

(The Pameradia House's greenhouse is famous, and it wouldn't be odd for someone to think that I asked Otou-sama for something expensive.)

However, since the same thing was built at the castle later, the greenhouse at the Pameradia mansion was generally thought to be a prototype, and not for Cordelia... Cordelia shrugged.

"It's the first time I've heard this, but it isn't surprising. It doesn't feel nice, but everyone has animosity from someone else."

If someone did say that to me directly, then I can refute and say I got my money through trading, so there's nothing to feel guilty about. On the other hand, I don't think it's a disadvantage in general because if someone thinks that I'm just an incompetent lady who just demands things, then they'll let their guard down during negotiations. I can get my revenge on the other person by getting the advantage.

In the first place, I already know my reputation to some extent. In the first place, I don't have time to worry about someone who has weak information gathering abilities.

"It's not worth worrying about, is that what you're saying? People call that negligence."

"That's right. But did you think Otou-sama would remain quiet if it were a problem?"

I once heard from Cyrus-oniisama that Pameradia House has a spy network. I've never gotten information from that route, but I don't think Otou-sama wouldn't hear about those rumours. Moreover, if Otou-sama doesn't say anything, then it's not a problem.

"The Earl? It seems like I have to be more vigilant against you than I thought. I can't tell what you really think because you're too calm. As expected of Vernoux-dono's childhood friend."

Clive was as harsh as ever, but she felt he had opened up to her a little since he had informed her that he needed to be vigilant against her. Also, she felt that his malicious expression had faded.

"... I can't waste time in a place like this."

"Then, have a nice day. I hope that you find His Highness."

"You don't need to tell me that."

Clive-sama left like that, but a lot of time has passed. I'm sure Vernoux-sama and Sylvester-sama are spending time leisurely. ——— She thought, as she spends time reading the books she had chosen. No one else visited during that time.



After that, she entrusted Ronnie, who had found a suitable time to find her, with the carriage arrangements. Then, she viewed the flowers near the Big Bookcase as she waited.

The carefully maintained flowers were those she should know the names for, but she felt that the petal shapes and colours were slightly different and rare. She felt as if they were unique varieties.

(I heard from Vernoux-sama's Okaa-sama that Her Majesty is conducting selective breeding at the tea party... But I wonder if she did that on these flowers.)

She was interested in the rare flower, but she didn't have a chance to ask her directly. Even if she had the opportunity to ask, unfortunately, she didn't want to get close to the royal family. *I'll search for a book on it the next time I come to the Big Bookcase. I'm sure it exists since it's the royal family's library.*

When Cordelia thought that, she suddenly felt someone's gaze on her and looked around.

She didn't know where the gaze was coming from. However, she felt as if it was silently calling out to her.

"... Who?"

She muttered, but couldn't confirm a figure close enough to hear that. On the one hand, she thought she had imagined it, but it was a creepy feeling that she had never felt before.

(This is inside the castle. It should be closely guarded.)

With that in mind, Cordelia concentrated and slowly headed to where she had felt the gaze.

She knew she should wait until Ronnie returned, but she didn't feel anything like malice or hostility from the gaze. *I'll just look a little and then come back.*

Cordelia concentrated magic power into her eyes and searched around for a presence. *The castle is closely guarded in one area, but they were probably in a place far from the most important part of the castle.* The place a few steps away from Cordelia wasn't closely guarded.

"Who's there?"

There's no way someone would be here.

She said with that reason in mind, but she received an answer at the same time wind passed through her.

"It's been a long time, Pameradia-ojousan."

It was a voice she hadn't heard for a long time, but she definitely didn't want to hear it.

"... Why are you here? No one expects a ghost to appear in the day time, do they?"

A low voice naturally escaped from Cordelia at the voice she hadn't heard in two years.

Act 49: Contracts Imposed with Confrontation

“What the hell do you want? Perhaps, you came here to get caught?”

“Don’t worry, I don’t have such praiseworthy feelings.”

“Praiseworthy? I don’t think you’re even normal.”

“That’s a shame.”

Ghost had appeared from the shadows and had little presence, but tension ran down Cordelia’s back.

(Even though it’s like he’s a mirage...)

The pressure that Ghost was lightly giving off was intense, and it took all she had to remain calm.

(I should have waited for Ronnie.)

If I had, then we might have caught Ghost. She thought, but Ghost might not have appeared had Ronnie been here. I know that he’s wary and quick at escaping.

(But, that means it’s unnatural for him to show up in the royal castle where it is closely guarded.)

If he came to the castle for something, then he wouldn’t act in a way that would reveal himself. If he didn’t need anything, then he wouldn’t come to the castle.

(And even during the Flora Silk incident, Ghost hadn’t been directly involved, as he just enjoyed the events as a spectator.)

If I think that way, then it’s hard to imagine that he came here to harm me, and if he wanted to hurt me then he would have attacked me before showing himself. However, he hadn’t. If there is a reason for him to come into contact with me then...

“Did you come here because you had something to say to me?”

“I’m glad you’re quick-witted. I heard that you could come to the castle, and thought of it as a chance, so I was waiting for you.”

Cordelia was rarely without a guard whenever she went out, so although she didn’t want to admit it, he was correct. Moreover, Cordelia, herself, thought of the castle as a safe place and hadn’t thought of any other dangerous elements except for the Prince.

“Even so, the security of the castle is amazing. I used a ridiculous amount of magic to erase my presence, but this is the only place I can sneak into. Jeez, I could probably take a lot of jobs if they loosen their guard a little. I could even come here to play.”

“If you want, I could call the guards here now?”

Judging from how guarded the castle was, if Cordelia were to use magic here, then the guards would immediately come flying here just from the magic reaction. However, Ghost could get away in the meantime. Cordelia didn’t want to let Ghost escape yet.

(I don’t think I can create a chance to catch him, but I want to get some information out of him.)

Cordelia thought as she examined his attitude.

Ghost was smiling wryly underneath his hood.

“Don’t look at me with such a scary face. I only came here to give you information.”

“Information?”

“Yup. In conclusion, I thought I should tell you that a certain man is trying to kidnap a kid. Don’t you feel like capturing the kidnappers?”

Suspicious.

Ghost shrugged towards Cordelia, who didn’t hide her expression before she spoke.

“Is it weird that I’m doing something righteous? Well, I don’t want to do something troublesome, but it can’t be helped. Unfortunately, it would be a nuisance for me if she were to be brought to Dulaus.”

“To the north? Are people in Dulaus trying to kidnap a child?”

I know that his headquarters were in Dulaus Kingdom to the north, but is it possible for kidnappers from that Kingdom to cross the border to target a specific child? But with that in mind, Cordelia gulped. Ghost laughed in satisfaction.

“It seems like you know who I’m talking about. Rumours about the 『Dreamer Girl』 have also reached the north a little. The mastermind behind the kidnapping wants to raise his own position.... No, he wants her power to overthrow the nation. That’s why he also hired kidnappers.”

『Dreamer Girl』 .

She frowned when she heard those words.

“To overthrow the nation... Some people think ridiculous things.”

The Heroine in the game used the knowledge she had gained in dreams to solve incidents and people’s problems. However, the game never showed that she lent a hand to those filled with selfish desires, and there were no mentions of her being kidnapped at a young age.

But, gossip about her reached the fortune-telling lover Hazel two years ago, and it also reached Vernoux and Gille, so it wasn’t strange if the rumours about her spread further. Still, Cordelia never predicted that kidnappers from foreign kingdoms would aim for her, and desperately suppressed her confusion.

(I have to calm down. He won’t tell me if I panic.)

She told herself, but she was agitated because the Heroine’s existence was told to her at an unexpected place.

“I’m doubtful about whether she has the power to shake the nation from what I’ve heard. But, if her powers are real, and Dulaus is thrown into chaos because it’s passed to that man, then I’d be troubled.”

“You’re worried even though you look down on kingdoms that are being destroyed from a high place? That’s surprising.”

“I don’t think it would be easy to see, but I can imagine that man would be suppressed by the royal family. However, I like their famous alcohol. If the battle affects the fields, then I’d be troubled. It would be a hindrance to my lifestyle, right?”

Even if he was looking for approval, Cordelia couldn’t agree.

“Why me? Do you think I would believe you and help out?”

“Even if you don’t want to cooperate with me, you’re the type who can’t leave an unfortunate person alone, right? And you’re careful, so you won’t be able to leave it alone even if you’re suspicious.”

Ghost said and laughed.

“I can get rid of my worries even if I kill the dreamer girl. But it seemed more interesting to leave it to you, and it seems like it would be a bad omen to kill the dreamer power. That’s why I’m leaving it to you.”

“Omen?”

“Yeah. Well, this is a service to you who would take care of this. Those who have the 『Dreamer Power』 in the past seem to lose that power in the end. They self-destruct because their dreams don’t come true and have negative effects on those around them. I’m not religious, but I don’t want to get close to it.”

Was there such a thing?

At least in my memories, I never heard about that happening in the game. Of course, he could be lying, but he doesn’t need to go out of his way to tell such a lie.

(I didn’t know that Ghost wants to avoid the Heroine whom I’ve never met before. And, I didn’t know if the dreamer power has a background like that.)

Because the game was told from the Heroine’s perspective, I knew about this power... so I didn’t research its predecessor, the 『Saint』. I need to quickly investigate this for my own sake too.

“You looked into it a lot.”

“I can’t say for sure, but I can also guess why they lose their power. But, well, I’m actually more interested in seeing how you will find the kidnappers instead of omens.”

“You have bad hobbies.”

“It’s a difference in perception. But I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Ghost said, then took a step backwards.

“Ah, it won’t be fun for me if you don’t act, so act, okay? That is the information provision fee, a contract.”

“Wh...?!”

“I’m looking forward to seeing how you will act. If you act, then I won’t complain even if it’s not amusing. Don’t do anything unnecessary. The goal is to get the kidnappers while keeping my information a secret. Good luck, Cordelia-san.”

The next moment, Ghost’s figure was far and small. She couldn’t even trace his presence.

“He got away... I couldn’t get any information about Ghost, himself, in the end.”

It was hard for Cordelia to catch up to someone who even Cyrus had failed to capture. The words she had uttered in this situation was more bitter and frustrated than she had imagined.

The Flora Silk incident.

He appeared in front of her today.

And, pushing the Heroine onto Cordelia.

Those things made her even more frustrated. But she had to hold that down for now.

(According to the game scenario, the Heroine should be taken in by the Clydereine House soon.)

If that happens, then I don’t have to worry about her getting kidnapped. Like the Pameradia House, the Clydereine House also employed talented magicians from the Magic Academy. If she isn’t kidnapped before then, then the kidnapper’s plans will surely fail.

(I can’t wait that long. I don’t know when she would be taken in by the Clydereine House.)

I don’t want to get involved. I shouldn’t get involved.

Cordelia strongly rejected the Heroine just like she did the Prince.

However, there’s no guarantee that the Heroine would live peacefully until she’s taken in by the Earl. Aren’t I living a different life from the game scenario?

(And... I can’t leave this alone since I already know about it.)

Some people tried to kidnap the Heroine in the game.

I don’t want to get involved, as much as possible, since she’s one of the people who control my fate. But I don’t have the nerve to leave this alone, since I know that she’ll be kidnapped.

She’s an ominous person to me, but she’s also a girl who is living a peaceful life in the royal capital. I could never permit her life to get shaken just because of other’s expectations. Even if it’s someone I want to avoid, I will regret it if I let them get thrown into a hopeless situation. I don’t know what kind of person the Heroine is, but I’m sure she’s not the type of person who wants to be thrown into a dangerous situation. If it’s about wanting to lead a peaceful life... then I won’t lose to anyone.

(Then, her situation takes priority until the situation is solved.)

And, it wouldn’t just be my problem if what Ghost said is correct and people want to kidnap her because they want to make use of her dreamer power.

“That’s right, this isn’t just for me.”

Cordelia whispered. *I feel like my resolution would weaken if I didn't put it into words. Ghost may have told a lie to kill time and tease me.*

(But, he isn't the type of person who would come here to satisfy himself just to tease me.)

Even if it is a lie, I have to confirm this.

(This is something I absolutely have to talk to Otou-sama about.)

However, Ghost said this was a 『Contract』. He might kill the Dreamer Girl just to make me regret breaking the contract.

Two years ago, I didn't forget the amused expression he had made while others despaired and how he didn't hesitate to murder.

(I have no choice but to proceed.)

The only conditions he gave me were 『Keep the information Ghost gave me a secret』 and 『I have to act』.

It shouldn't break the rules if I gave the information to Otou-sama and Onii-samas after I've investigated this.

If so, then I have to quickly gather evidence and put a target on the kidnappers. If I can do this, then I can keep the Heroine safe.

She quickly left after she made her decision.

This was Cordelia's current plan.

(Watch. I'm sure you wanted to take advantage of me this time, but I'll definitely catch your tail too.)

When Cordelia spat this out in her mind, she heard the sound of footsteps approaching from far away.

"Oh, Ojou-sama! So you were here. Argh, don't move around by yourself."

Ronnie said while looking relaxed, "It's beautiful here too."

Cordelia gulped a little and looked up at the smiling Ronnie.

"Say, Ronnie. Can we take a detour before going to Witch-sensei's place?"

"Okay, but where do you want to go?"

"I want to see the church. I read in a book that the stained glass is beautiful."

"... That's rare."

He noticed something. It might have been convenient for her to interpret his voice like that, but she was relieved that he hadn't objected.

Act 50: Dreamer Girl

After leaving the castle, Cordelia didn't head to the confectionery shop like they had planned, but instead, went to the church where the heroine stayed, with Ronnie. Fulvia's house was close enough to the church that she was able to hear the choir, so Cordelia and Ronnie walked down the same route they did when they went to her house.

(I'm going to see the heroine so I can grasp the situation... I'm sure Ghost will be close by for a while to check on my progress.)

If it's a place with lots of people, then he can just blend in, but if it's a place with few people, then he'll hide so he can observe me. However, if I take a route guarded by knights, then he might get caught.

She had been thinking the whole time they were walking, so they reached the church in no time.

However, Cordelia saw an unexpected situation when she arrived at the church.

(Knights in front of the church...?)

This church was small. She had heard that there were guards in large churches that have people visiting a lot, but there probably wasn't any disorder in a small church that was located in a quiet place.

(And, it looks like the knight's flag is hoisted on one of the buildings next to the church, but what is the meaning of this...? Huh?)

She looked at the building, wondering what it was, and saw someone familiar.

"Is that Clarice-sama...?"

Although they weren't close enough for Cordelia's whisper to reach Clarice, she immediately noticed Cordelia because there weren't many people around. She looked surprised and walked towards Cordelia.

"Long time no see, Cordelia-sama. How are you?"

"I'm fine. How about you, Clarice-sama?"

"Me too. I'm too healthy and have extra strength, so I'm working in perfect condition."

Clarice showed a calm and elegant gesture. She was a female knight in the Imperial Guards and was Cyrus's subordinate. Cordelia had met her when she had first encountered Ghost. She hadn't joked the first time they had met, but she was making jokes now, so this was her real personality.

"Where are you going today?"

"I'm on my way to visit Pharmacist-sama, but I read about the stained glass in this church, so I thought I would stop by to see it."

"I see. Oh yes, I heard that you won the competition show. Congratulations."

"Thank you very much."

“Actually, the knights have been talking about the edible paper. The knights use a magic medicine to restore their strength... it’s effective, but it smells terrible and is hard to swallow when it’s mixed with water, and if we eat it in its powder form, then we almost faint from the prolonged bitter and astringent flavour.”

“Th-that’s... People say that good medicine is bitter, but I’m happy it could be of use.”

The medicine itself may require a taste improvement, but Clarice’s voice indicated that there was little hope for that.

(I haven’t heard anything about this at home, but my Onii-samas might be happy with this as well.)

It’s necessary to check whether the timing of when the oblaat melts will obstruct the effects since the medicine works inside the body, but if I can check this, then I want to mass-produce the oblaats as soon as possible.

(If I make it into capsules, then it would be easy to carry, but that’s just a plan right now.)

There’s something I have to prioritise right now. When she thought that, Clarice gave Cordelia a surprising proposal.

“Cordelia-sama, would you like me to show you around, since you’re going to the church? I’ll tell you a bit about what I know.”

“Is that alright?”

Cordelia was surprised because it looked like Clarice was still working, but Clarice laughed a little mischievously.

“I was actually on the night shift, so I’m already done with work.”

“Th-then, aren’t you tired...?”

It’s already past noon. If she’s done with work, then she probably wants to go home and sleep.

However, Clarice laughed softly and dispelled Cordelia’s anxiety.

“You don’t have to worry about me. I might be free from the bitterness of that medicine, so please let me do what I can.”

“Ojou-sama, why don’t you accept it?”

Ronnie urged Cordelia to accept since she was still hesitant.

His expression said, ‘you’ll regret it if you refuse’.

“Then, please do.”

“Yes, of course.”

The stained glass was just an excuse for her to see the heroine, but she couldn’t refuse Clarice’s goodwill, and Ronnie, who Clarice should thank for the oblaat, had told her to accept. *I think I’ll let her show me around.*

“Mm, I’m sorry, Clarice-sama. I forgot to introduce you two. This is Ronnie Eris, a magician who works for us.”

“My name is Ronnie Eris. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Clarice Keighley.”

After they introduced themselves, Clarice entered the building next to the church and said, “I’ll tell my colleagues first,” before coming back out.

“I’m sorry for keeping you waiting. Shall we go in?”

“Come to think of it, why are you here today, Clarice-sama? Is it because of your job?”

She didn’t intend to force Clarice to talk if it was a confidential matter, but she wondered why Clarice, a member of the Imperial Guards, was doing a night shift here.

Clarice laughed as if it was not a big deal.

“We’re here for support. The jurisdiction in this area is wide, so a new garrison was set up. The station was opened up a month ago, but we still have a lot of moving and recruitment to do.”

“Thank you for your hard work. Is there a knight standing guard at the church because the station is next door?”

“Yes. We also want to deepen our relations with our neighbours. The station usually has two guards stationed outside, but the road here is close, so we can deal with any trouble that occurs even if we have a person stationed in each place. We surprisingly have a good reputation here.”

Cordelia smiled as she listened to Clarice. *It’s rare to talk with knights, so I somehow understand how they feel. But at the same time, I have a question.*

(If the Heroine is near the knights, then she shouldn’t get kidnapped easily from the church, right...?)

Even if they’re not here to protect the Dreamer Girl, the heroine will be safe.

But if they’ve been here since last month, then Ghost should know about this.

(What is the meaning of this? Do the kidnappers have a plan that even the knights won’t be able to stop?)

The knights will share information amongst themselves if they see anyone suspicious. Is Ghost hinting that the kidnappers are on the inside? Cordelia walked through the gates of the church while being confused by the information she had received from Clarice.

The church was cool and quiet, and there weren’t any other people except for Cordelia, Clarice and Ronnie.

“The priest told me that this church is small, but it has the oldest history in the royal capital. The architectural style and sculptures in this church are important cultural assets. The stone statue on the right side of the altar...”

When Clarice began explaining that, the door behind the stone statue opened, and an elderly man appeared.

The man looked at Clarice and seemed surprised.

“Oh, Clarice-dono. Are they guests?”

“Hello, Priest-sama.”

“I’m sorry for interrupting you while you were showing them around. I don’t have to worry about suspicious people because the guards are nearby, but I can’t get out of my habit of asking.”

“No, security is important. Please keep doing so.”

“Guests, I’m sorry for interrupting.”

“It’s alright. Have there been suspicious people around here?”

Cordelia’s voice sounded more uneasy than she had wanted it to be, but the priest shook his head.

“Suspicious people have never visited this church but a lot of people visit the royal capital. So, I think we should be on our guard since we look after children here.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

“But I don’t need to worry too much since the knights are around.”

The priest smiled gently to reassure Cordelia. Then, he said before leaving the room, “Then, I’ll go out for a bit.”

After the door closed, Clarice swore to Cordelia since she was worried.

“I’m sorry, we talked about something scary. But don’t worry. We pledged to strive ourselves to protect those who live in the royal capital every day. We won’t break our pledge.”

“Clarice-sama is very cool.”

“I’m delighted you think that way.”

“I have a friend who wants to become a knight. I’m sure she gets very excited because knights are like this.”

If Dahlia-sama saw Clarice-sama right now, then she would shriek in joy.

Cordelia and Clarice smiled at each other, then they heard children shrieking outside. It sounded as if they were quarrelling like the children outside the Oulu poorhouse did, instead of playing.

“Are they fighting?”

“The knight outside will probably meditate if they were fighting...”

Clarice frowned. She seemed to know why they were fighting.

Cordelia thought that the children who lived here were fighting, but the screams were coming from the gate, instead of from inside.

However, Cordelia knew one of the voices.

“I’ll go out a bit to see what’s going on.”

Ronnie also thought of something and went outside first. Cordelia also wanted to confirm this with her own eyes.

“I’m a little bit worried, so I’ll go out.”

“Then, me too.”

Clarice was also worried, and they quickly headed towards the door.

When Cordelia went outside, Ronnie was already there, and he looked shocked.

A boy who Cordelia knew was standing there.

“Mick. Why are you screaming in a place like this?”

“Oh. It’s Dilly. What’re you doing?”

“I’m the one who’s asking you that.”

Mick was the one who was screaming, but there were two other children from Oulu’s poorhouse here. They were holding sweets they’d brought.

(I wonder if they were on their way to Obaa-sama’s house from the market.)

They’ll have to walk past here to get to Obaa-sama’s house, but I don’t think Mick would raise his voice since he’s in a good mood from buying sweets. He doesn’t look like he’s in a bad mood either, so I’m not sure why he’s yelling.

But there’s something I have to warn them about before asking this.

“Everyone, Sensei said that you can’t eat and walk, right?”

The two children hid their sweets when they heard Cordelia, but Mick didn’t seem scared.

“It’s fine. She can’t see us. We were talking about buying these again because they’re yummy, and then she interrupted us. She’s the one with the problem since she wants to pick a fight instead of buying sweets.”

Mick said as he pointed at the girl, who Clarice was lecturing.

“—— We told you that you can’t go out on your own. The priest is worried about you too.”

“But they’re going to get wet because it’s going to rain soon! I saw it in my dream, so it’s definitely going to rain! I didn’t see the kids, but it’s going to rain. They’re going to get wet!”

It was the first time Cordelia had heard this girl’s voice. However, she couldn’t help but widened her eyes when she heard what the girl had said. She couldn’t see the girl fully because Clarice was in the way, but Cordelia knew that figure.

The pretty girl with light pink, soft and slightly wild hair with bright blue eyes looked younger than the one in Cordelia's memories. But, she wanted to avoid the girl just like she did with Sylvester. In the game, she was 『Cordelia's』 opposite and was the 『Heroine and Dreamer Girl』 , Shelley.

“——!”

Cordelia gulped.

This was a surprising development for Cordelia since she had just wanted to secretly investigate the situation first, but Shelley ended up quarrelling with Mick.

“She started talking about nonsense when we said that we were going to go buy some more sweets. She started yelling when we ignored her.”

Mick said and sighed. Then, he bit on the candy in his hand again.

“It’s so bright out, so it won’t rain.”

Mick doesn’t know that Shelley is the 『Dreamer Girl』. Cordelia didn’t even know if he knew that someone like that exists.

“Dilly?”

“Oh... Sorry. The weather was it?”

Reflecting on why Mick was strangely upset, Cordelia looked up at the sky to calm herself down.

“It might rain. There are thin clouds in the sky, and it’s covering the sun. And, a black bird is flying low over there, right? The insects they eat are flying low because their wings are heavy.”

She didn’t care much, but if she paid attention, she could feel that the surrounding air was a little moist.

“A bird...? So, how do you know it’s going to rain?”

“Well, I can explain it to you, but if you want to buy sweets, then why don’t you go ahead. I’m heading towards Sensei’s house, so I’ll explain it to you there if I have time.”

“What the hell, you’re pompous. Well, if you say so, then I’ll listen, but you have to explain it to me properly later. She said that she saw it rain in her dreams, like I can understand something like that.”

“You know, Mick. That’s not something you say to someone when you ask them for something, is it?”

“Heehee. Well, bye. Let’s go! I’ll see you later Dilly!”

Cordelia waved at Mick and his friends who were running off and took a deep breath.

However, the words she heard right after that froze her blood.

“Those kids didn’t listen to what I said...”

Cordelia glanced at the girl who said that with a hint of annoyance.

Shelley was biting her lips as if she couldn’t accept it.

“Thank you for telling them about the rain.”

Cordelia smiled at Shelley while trying to remove the stiffness from her voice.

It was scary for her to talk to Shelley, but she had to if she wanted to investigate her, and she didn’t want to leave a bad impression on Shelley.

But Shelley looked unhappy when she turned towards Cordelia.

“Why are you thanking me? There’s no reason for you to thank me. They only believed that it would rain because you said so.”

“But, if you hadn’t said anything, then I wouldn’t have been able to tell them.”

She didn’t think her words got rid of Shelley’s frustrations, but she felt that Shelley had frowned less, and her hostility towards Cordelia had lessened.

(Well, of course. It’s our first meeting. If 『Cordelia』 hadn’t done unnecessary things, then they wouldn’t have had conflict in the game, and 『Cordelia』 had been the one who was hostile towards Shelley.)

『Cordelia』 had lost her life because she 『lost control of her magic due to her jealousy towards the Prince and Shelley』, so Cordelia didn’t think it would happen to her, since she had been avoiding the Prince.

(If I sort this out, and stay away from Shelley, then I’ll be able to live in peace again.)

It’s probably difficult to not be involved with her, since she’s from a noted Earl House like I am.

But we don’t have to get along. ——— Otou-sama isn’t on good terms with Earl Clydereine, so I only have to associate with her and not get in her way.

(Even if there are differences in the game, it should be safe if I don’t get in their way at all.)

She was able to calm down a little when she thought that, but her heart was still beating fast.

Next to Cordelia, Shelley pouted and said, “Well, I don’t care if they get wet or not anymore. They didn’t believe in my dreams at all.”

Cordelia felt relieved by her words, even though Shelley was sulking a little.

(She’s really strong-willed, but I wonder if she’s kind-hearted deep down...)

There’s a problem with the way she speaks, but her personality and what she says differs from the heroine in the game, but she had said that because she didn’t want Mick and the other two to get wet. That being the case, I’d like to believe that as long as I’m being careful, as I have been, there won’t be any problems.

“Shelley-san, you should go inside before it rains. And, please don’t go outside through the hedges anymore. Tell someone when you leave, and leave through the gate.”

“But, I heard the kids’ voices...”

Clarice spoke, and Shelley turned away and whispered. However, she seemed to have admitted that it was her fault for not going out through the gate, even though her actions were childish.

“You were worried about them, weren’t you?”

Shelley’s eyes sparkled when Cordelia said this.

“Because my power is supposed to make everyone happy! And, if I help everyone, then I can be of service to His Highness one day! If I can be of service to him, then he’ll return the favour!”

The words that had been uttered by someone who she was finally beginning to feel relieved about made her freeze.

(What is this uncomfortable feeling...?)

I wouldn’t be surprised if they had met somewhere, but I doubt she would have realised they’d met. And why does she already have feelings for the Prince?

(Did the Prince reveal his identity when they met? No, I don’t think he would have.)

If the Prince was someone who would say careless things, then I don’t believe Vernoux-sama would be his friend. Vernoux-sama is probably too lazy to approach the Prince.

(Besides, the Prince returning the favour...? This is different from the game.)

In the game, Shelley used her power for people who she knew, she wasn’t the type of person to tell strangers about her power, like she did with Mick. And, most importantly, she never thought of using her own abilities as a weapon.

“But kids like that still don’t know about my powers. I have to try harder so that the Prince will find out about my powers.”

“Shelley, if you don’t go back soon, then everyone would be worried that you snuck off somewhere again.”

“Ookay.”

Shelley cheered up while they were talking, and briefly replied to Clarice, before walking back into the church.

However, while she was walking, she turned back to look at Cordelia.



“Say, you know who I am?”

She asked that as a question, but her voice was full of confidence.

Shelley laughed with satisfaction when she saw Cordelia nod before going back into the church.

“I’m surprised that Cordelia-sama is also friends with the children in town.”

Cordelia turned back in shock when Clarice spoke to her.

She hadn’t noticed that she had been staring at the closed church doors until Clarice spoke to her.

“The children from before are from a neighbouring village. I interact with them through welfare projects.”

“I see. It’s wonderful to see that you’re so loved.”

Clarice smiled in understanding, but after a while, she looked down and whispered.

“Cordelia-sama, you know about the 『Dreamer Girl』 too, don’t you?”

“Yes. I didn’t think she was that energetic...”

It wasn’t weird for Cordelia to hear rumours that spread around the royal capital, but she didn’t want people to think that she came to the church to see Shelley’s dream fortunes. Cordelia had come here to see the girl herself, and not to have her fortunes told. She was worried about this, but Clarice didn’t seem to notice.

“I haven’t talked to Shelley much, but she seems to get involved with others and direct them in a better direction. She also tells them what’s good for them. However, people around her are worried that she might be using her rare power carelessly. Right now, she’s only fortune-telling about the weather, but they’re worried that someone will use her for their own self-interests.”

“Are her fortunes correct?”

Clarice nodded silently at Cordelia’s question. There was concern on her face.

“She’s trying to spread her fame by increasing her abilities and using it, and is trying to be of use to a lot of people so that she can support His Highness one day. But even if her wish comes true... if she continues to be overconfident, then it’ll become poison one day.”

“Poison...”

“But this is just my personal opinion. Some believe that she’s the second coming of the Saint and that she will become a guide to this kingdom’s prosperity.”

“It’s a difficult problem, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I still can’t tell what her true powers are, and she’s still growing. So, I might be worrying for no reason.”

Clarice relaxed a little after saying that and smiled.

“But her powers are really rare right now, so suspicious people will have their eyes on her. So, the priests are keeping an eye on her so that she doesn’t sneak off on her own. Luckily, we knights are stationed close by, so we can help them with this.”

Clarice was worried about Shelley as a knight, and Cordelia agreed. *If Clarice-sama is right, then Shelley is using her powers for the sake of others. So, I can understand their worries and fears.*

(But the knights were more worried about her powers than the person herself.)

I hope she can spend her days peacefully until Earl Clydereine welcomes her home.

I hope, but there are too many things to worry about. It would be difficult for someone to kidnap her because the knights are around, and they’re also paying attention to her powers. Even more so, since the priests think something could happen to her.

(What the heck does Ghost know?)

It would be difficult to get help from the inside since the priests are on the lookout. Or did Ghost expect me to overlook the possibility of 『something』 and is enjoying the situation?

“But, lately, things have been looking good.”

“Huh?”

Cordelia looked up and glanced in the direction that Clarice was looking in. Then, a carriage gradually approached.

The carriage stopped in front of the church, and a slightly slim man with a cane appeared.

When the man saw Clarice, he said, “Oh,” and smiled gently.

“Why, hello, Keighley-dono. Thank you for your hard work today as well.”

“You’re always so dignified and reliable.”

The man who greeted Clarice ——— Earl Zakharov, smiled gently.

(Earl Zakharov...? Mm, was his name Boris?)

Cordelia only knew the name well enough to point out their fief on a map. But she hadn’t learnt much about them since their land didn’t stand out, and the Earl, himself, wasn’t active in politics. Furthermore, this was the first time she had met the Earl since they weren’t involved with her Pameradia House.

I’ve met someone unexpected, she thought as she looked for the right timing to introduce herself. Suddenly, Earl Zakharov looked at her.

“This red-eyed Ojou-san... are you Earl Pameradia’s daughter?”

“It’s nice to meet you, Earl Zakharov. My name is Cordelia Enna Pameradia.”

“Oh, how rude of me. I’m Boris Zakharov. I’m not as famous as your father, but I’m an Earl.”

He might have been joking, but it was hard for Cordelia to respond to that. She couldn't confirm this, but then denying it was a lie. She didn't know how to answer and smiled. Earl Zakharov didn't wait for her to reply and continued speaking.

"I've heard rumours that you launched a charity with Marquis Flantheim's son. I also support various places, but I would like to exchange ideas with you if we get the chance."

"Th-thank you very much."

Surprised by his unexpected words, Cordelia thanked him. Earl Zakharov smiled wider, and turned back to Clarice.

"Is that child here today?"

"She is. She's full of energy today as well, and tried to sneak out a while ago."

"I see. I'm looking forward to seeing her."

He said, before slowly disappearing into the church. He walked lightly despite carrying a cane. Clarice saw him off and whispered with a gentle expression on her face.

"Earl Zakharov sees the image of his late wife in Shelley."

"His wife's image...?"

"Yes. He's looking for clues to see if she's related to him, and the church is also watching them warmly. The church trusts the Earl a lot because he has contributed a lot to them, but even if that wasn't the case, he could probably adopt her if she agrees."

Earl Zakharov certainly looks like a gentle man at first glance. And, he knew about the mobile library even though he doesn't have children my age, so he's familiar with charity work.

(But I'm sure they're not related. Of course, this world doesn't have to be exactly like the game...)

Still, it's bothering me since there's a lot of things in this world happened exactly like it had in the game.

(Wait. There was something that made Earl Clydereine conclude that she was his daughter. What was it...?)

If Shelley had something with a family crest on it, then people would know straight away.

But, if she had something like that, then the people at the church would have found it.

(I'll look up Earl Zakharov when I get home.)

As long as the knights are around, there'll be a commotion if someone tries to enter uninvited. If so, then the situation isn't as bad as I imagined for now.

"But, rain, she said...? Cordelia-sama, you're visiting Pharmacist-sama after this, aren't you?"

"Yes, that's the plan."

“Then, you should finish your business before it rains. Why don’t I show you around the church another day? I’m free the whole day tomorrow, would that be alright with you?”

“Thank you very much, then can I ask you to show me around tomorrow?”

“Of course.”

Cordelia appreciated Clarice’s offer.

(In any case, I have to come here again.)

I’m lucky that I have a reason to visit. First, I have to research what I need by tomorrow. I can’t say what’s right and wrong at this stage.

Cordelia thought as she parted ways with Clarice, and left the church.



On the way to Fulvia's house, Ronnie sighed after being silent for a long time.

"It was bizarre. That girl and how Ojou-sama acted that is."

"Me too?"

"You were restless."

"I can't deny that. I mean, she's a rare type of girl."

I really want to deny it, but it might seem like I'm hiding my agitation. She shrugged and agreed by making it a joke.

"Well, she's a very strong girl. Isn't there a high chance that Ojou-sama will meet strong people?"

"Maybe. But being strong isn't bad."

"Well, confidence can often lead to success but conceitedness also leads to failure."

I was certainly troubled that Hazel-sama didn't listen to me when we first met, but that matter was related to her, so I can understand her desperate feelings.

On the other hand, Shelley was angry that Mick and the others wouldn't listen to her allegations, even though she had said it for their sake.

(She lost her temper because things didn't turn out the way she wanted to, even though she had said it for their sakes. She's different from the heroine I know from the game.)

If Shelley is different from the heroine in the game, then it might not affect my future even if I'm not scared. It's not like I don't want to have this hope, but I feel like another problem will occur even if I'm involved or not. I'm also worried about what she said about the prince.

"But words said based on dreams. She's like an oracle."

"She is."

"I could live an easy life if I could dream about how to get rich fast."

"Oh my, do you want to see that kind of dream, Ronnie?"

"Hmm... No, it's troublesome if I think about it carefully. I feel like I'll be asked for lots of things from different people, and it'll be a lot of trouble in the end."

Cordelia sighed, *is it alright for him to understand with that kind of reasoning?*

"Well, that girl doesn't seem to be able to dream about what she's going to do, so she might not do that. At any rate, she said that 『her powers can make everyone happy』."

"Yes, that's right."

Like Ronnie said, Cordelia didn't think that Shelley dreamt of herself. If she did, then she would dream of a way to convince someone like Mick, who doesn't believe in her dreams, and from the rumours that Cordelia had heard, it didn't seem like Shelley's dreams helped what Shelley did.

(But I don't think she's like that. I wonder if she's like the game heroine, where she doesn't use her powers for herself.)

The heroine in the game might not have any need to see a dream like that, according to the scenario, so it might be possible, and Shelley might actually see dreams like that even though she doesn't tell people about it.

There are too many uncertainties, and I feel depressed and scared, but I decided that I would protect her. If I can't leave her alone, then I'll just have to help her.

"Hey, do you think people can enter the church and kidnap her?"

"Kidnap? Are you worried about what Keighley-dono is worried about too, Ojou-sama?"

"Yes."

"I don't think it's impossible, but it'll be difficult. Even if the knights are around, there are a lot of blind spots. The church is a place where people can freely enter, so it's hard to prevent crime there, therefore it's easy if they just come into contact with her."

"I knew it... But they have to come into contact with her, right?"

"Yes. People will know even if a little commotion is caused, so it's difficult for the perpetrators to secure an escape route. It would be fine if they just escaped themselves, but it would be difficult for them to escape with that girl. However, the situation is different if she sneaks out of the church all the time."

Certainly, they might not need a guide inside if Shelley continues to act the way she does. If they're waiting for the chance to kidnap her, then there's no advantage to them letting others know about their plan.

(... It's really a headache-inducing problem.)

It'll be fine if she recognises the danger of her peculiar power. Still, if she's welcomed into noble society with her attitude like that, then I'm worried that she would cause problems because she misjudged a situation and acts inappropriately.

Cordelia thought that and suddenly someone spoke to her.

"Oh, Cordelia-san?"

She turned around and saw a familiar boy with his attendant.

"Oh my! This is a surprise, Myles-sama."

Viscount Gunnell's son, Myles. She had become friends with him, and he was also good friends with Vernoux. He was also in the mobile library planning group. However, this was her first time meeting him by chance in town.

“How do you do? We’ve met in an unexpected place.”

“I’m glad you look well, Cordelia-san. But I’m surprised. I thought that Vernoux would be the only one who I would meet like this.”

Cordelia smiled wryly since Vernoux strolling around town was common knowledge.

“Come to think of it, I’ve heard about it. You got a good result for the competition show. Congrats.”

“Thank you very much. This is also thanks to you.”

“I was surprised because I didn’t think that seaweed could become something like that. I have to make sure that father doesn’t learn I discussed the seaweed with you since the beginning. If he finds out, he’ll definitely get mad and yell, 『Make better deals』.”

Myles joked, but his tone conveyed his heartfelt blessing.

I feel bad, but I still wouldn’t have talked to him about it because of the benefits. Perhaps, Myles-sama understands that and congratulated me, so that’s why he can laugh.

“Where did you go today? No wait, are you going somewhere now?”

“I visited the Big Bookcase in the library a while ago, but I’m on my way to visit a pharmacist I know. I also stopped by the church.”

“I see, that’s a shame. I got an interesting book, so I wanted to ask if you would drop by the office with me if you have time... Maybe another time.”

“Yes, another time.”

Cordelia thanked Myles, who withdrew his offer while laughing. She felt bad and thanked him.

“But the church? Which church did you visit?”

“The one famous for its stained glass. It’s the oldest church in the royal capital...”

“Oh, you must be talking about the one Earl Zakharov visits a lot.”

“Oh my, do you know about that?”

Cordelia widened her eyes in surprise because he had guessed correctly, and Myles continued while smiling.

“He’s famous for his charity work, and he used to work in the same marine industry as my House.”

“... Used to?”

“Yeah. He lost two ships in the summer and went out of business two years before we were born, but he’s still doing charity work. He doesn’t appear much, but he has done a lot of charity work. If you can speak to him, then you might be able to learn something. —— Having said that, I’ve never met him either.”

Cordelia was surprised by what Myles had said. *Myles-sama has information on him but has never met him before. Still, I wonder if I can get more information from him...* Cordelia thought, but his attendant blocked her from asking.

“Young Master, it’s nearly time.”

“Oh, okay... It’s unfortunate, but I’ll see you next time.”

Myles waved his hand as he left, and Cordelia heard, “Young Master, you should stop.” Then, she spoke to Ronnie, “Let’s go.”

(I don’t know how much damage losing two ships can cause, but I’m sure it’s not small.)

Earl Zakharov was a man who had a friendly smile. From what she heard from Clarice and Myles, he did a lot of charity work, which meant he’d been supporting the church for a long time.

(I don’t think I should doubt that person, but I wouldn’t know what type of person he is until I investigate him.)

I don’t have any clues right now, so I have no choice but to look at every possibility.

On the one hand, I hope I find something, but on the other, I hope that I don’t find anything, and that everything is just Ghost’s lie.

◆◆◆◆◆

After that, she received herbs from Fulvia and explained why it would rain to Mick and the other two. Then, after she got home, she headed straight to the library to look up information on Earl Zakharov.

(I’m sure it was around here... Oh, found it.)

Cordelia picked up a book and turned the pages.

(His fief doesn’t have anything special about it after all.)

The main industry of Earl Zakharov’s fief, which extended from the sea to inland, was considered as agriculture, but they sold it for cheaper because the quality was inferior. The harvest there wasn’t bad, so he could secure income, but there wasn’t any extra money.

(Even so, he’s actively maintaining his fief. As expected, he puts a lot of effort into charity work... is what I would like to say, but if I think about the income his fief makes, he might be overspending.)

She thought that, as she picked up another document. The document contained transactions his fief did on marine trade, as well as their top products in the last two decades. The income he earned from the marine trade seemed higher than the income he earned from agriculture. She continued reading and reached the year when Earl Zakharov lost two ships. It was written that he had purchased two ships with state-of-the-art magic tools at the beginning of that year.

(The two ships he lost were new ships, weren't they? But he couldn't get any more money, so he had to give up on buying new ships, or something like that...?)

Cordelia couldn't imagine how much the latest ships would cost, but this was a world where the cost of a magic dryer was the same price as a carriage. Buying two ships would require a lot of money, and if it was powered by magic tools, then she could picture that his financial situation would deteriorate the moment he loses them.

Cordelia turned to the next page and frowned.

(But the Earl's donations haven't changed... No, is he donating more money every year?)

Although the donation amounts weren't written down, their destination was, and that increased as the years went by. *I don't think he would decrease the amount donated so that he could donate to more places. Nobles don't want to lose face so they won't reduce the amount they donate so that they can make other donations.*

However, what does it mean when he continues to donate more money after he loses his ships?

(I'm curious, but I didn't think it would bother me in a lot of ways.)

If he wasn't increasing the amounts he donated, then it was possible that he would kidnap Shelley for money. But he doesn't seem like a money-grubber when he does charity work which doesn't bring in income. Earl Zakharov seems like someone who would donate more money if he had any, and he could just stop donating if he wants money.

(And, I don't think he would need to announce that he wants to adopt her if he wants to kidnap her.)

It's possible that people would be suspicious of him if it's known that he has a strong interest in Shelley. Normally, you would want to avoid that if you're trying to kidnap someone.

Having said that, his behaviour is incomprehensible since his income and expenditures don't match up, and I'm curious about his relationship with Shelly.

"I wonder if I need to observe their progress."

She couldn't get information on Earl Zakharov like she had wanted, but she was going to the church again tomorrow. If things went well, then she will see Shelley again.

(Does she know that she is Earl Clydereine's daughter? Or if I can find something that hints that she is, then this problem will come to an end.)

Without that, even Cordelia couldn't obtain proof.

"I wish I could remember what happened in the game..."

What would be enough to prove that a town girl is an Earl's daughter? There might have been a scene in the game about it, but unfortunately, I can't remember. But if I can find that, and get Earl Clydereine to discover the possibility, then they can work things out somehow with a magic test which is similar to a DNA test.

“I wonder if the hint is something that can’t be separated from her body, since others haven’t found it. I wonder if I can find something like that.”

Cordelia wasn’t confident that she could guide the conversation in that direction. One of the problems was that Shelley was strong-willed and didn’t seem like the type to listen to people, but the other reason was that she hated having to talk to Shelley and the Prince, ever since her memories returned at the age of three.

“I already made up my mind... I can only say that these are my instincts.”

Cordelia gave a long sigh. *My body will continue to refuse now that I’ve decided to do this.* She prepared herself again while putting away the books that she had read, and Lara appeared in the library.

“Ojou-samaa, dinner’s ready!”

“Thanks.”

“I can’t believe you’re in the library when you already went to the library in the castle. Ojou-sama, you really love books and flowers,”

Lara said, as she picked up the remaining books and helped Cordelia put them away.

“Oh, Ojou-sama. Can I have the day off tomorrow?”

“Day off? That’s fine. Were you able to rearrange your work?”

Cordelia tilted her head at the rare request, and Lara spoke proudly.

“Perfectly! Actually, the merchants who came today told me that there’s a circus in town. I don’t have a pre-booked ticket, and it might be hard to watch the show because there’s a lot of people, but I heard there’s a lot of rare animals around the tent, so I want to go and see them.”

Lara said as her eyes shone, and Cordelia laughed a little.

“Alright. Have fun.”

“Thanks!”

“Why don’t you go with Ronnie? It’s not fun to go alone, right?”

“You’re also going out tomorrow, aren’t you Ojou-sama? I talked about it with Mentor, and she’s interested, so I’ll be going there with her and her grandchild. Ronnie should be doing his job.”

“I see.”

“And, does Ronnie look like someone who would be happy at seeing animals?”

“... That’s also true.”

Cordelia laughed lightly, *so that’s why she didn’t seem disappointed.* She was a little surprised that Lara had become friends with Mentor’s grandchild.

“Ojou-sama, why don’t you go there for a break? You might come up with something new if you go.”

“Hmm, I’ll think about it.”

I’m interested, but this isn’t the time to be visiting the circus.

“If you want to go, then I’ll show you around, so don’t hesitate to tell me.”

Lara proclaimed boldly, and her mind was already on the circus.



The next day, Cordelia went to the church with Ronnie and met up with Clarice.

Clarice had said she had the day off today and was wearing a simple outfit: a blouse with a brooch, a long skirt and armed with a sword.

“Thank you for showing me around today, Clarice-sama.”

“I’m looking forward to it, Cordelia-sama. And, Eris-san.”

“Hello.”

“Well, let’s start with the stained glass and leave the stone statue for later. There are a lot of things to see from chairs to candlesticks.”

Clarice started her explanation without any idle chat because they had been interrupted yesterday. Cordelia looked around the church as they moved to the stained glass in front of the church. She had been nervous yesterday, but in addition to chairs and candlesticks, as Clarice had stated, there were also rare stones in the floor.

(There really is a lot of rare items. I’m thankful that Clarice-sama is showing me around, but do we have enough time for her to explain everything?)

Cordelia panicked a little in front of all the cultural assets. *How long would it take for her to explain all these cultural assets? I might not have time to see Shelley.*

(But it should be easy for me to notice something strange if I’m close by.)

In addition to the knights on guard, Clarice and Ronnie were also here. They should be able to fulfil the minimum role for crime prevention. Cordelia also thought that she needed to meet Shelley, but it was too hasty of her to say that now. If she gets the timing wrong, then people might suspect her of scheming something.

“Cordelia-sama, you said you read about it in a book, so I don’t think I need to explain the basics, but the name of this stained glass is 『The Descent of the Saint』. It depicts the Saint who descended from the sky to help the first King build this kingdom.”

Cordelia also knew about the history that Clarice was talking about.

Just like history in Japan, the kingdom had a lot of myths from its early days. The kingdom had a history of about a thousand years, but it was a thousand years behind Japan, where people used smartphones freely, so it wasn't weird for them to think that ghosts appeared in front of them. She even believed that there might be ghosts in this world, since it had magic.

She was someone who was born with her previous life memories, so it wouldn't be strange for a saint to descend from the sky.

“—— Now then, I'll talk about the stone statue.”

She had only intended to think for a short while, but she had pondered for so long that the topic changed. Cordelia reflected because she had done something rude.

“This stone statue is of the evangelist who looked over the First King and the Saint.”

“Evangelist...?”

“We don't know the evangelist's name or gender. However, it is said that the official records from the period in which the evangelist lived was mostly written by the person themselves.”

“I see.”

“I heard that the evangelist had a diary, separate from the official records they wrote. However, their diary isn't counted as an official record, and not a lot of manuscripts were printed because they wrote a lot of bad things about the church, but you might be able to find a copy at the Big Bookcase. I've never seen it before, but I hear that they wrote a lot about the interactions between the First King and the Saint.”

Cordelia wasn't interested in the legend between the First King and the Saint, because, even if she didn't know about their story, it was fine as long as she knew about how the kingdom was founded. However, if that diary had a lot of things written about the Saint, then she might be able to find some hints to Shelley's power, and she might find what Ghost meant when he said 『The ominous end of the Saint』.

(The Heroine's power aside, 『The ominous end of the Saint』 might not have a big impact on me, but...)

Like when I heard that Shelley might be kidnapped, I want to prevent this ominous end if I can.

My first priority is to ensure my own safety, but I don't want to pretend that I don't notice others misfortunes just so that I can be safe. And, if the person who had the power to see dreams in the past destroyed herself and 『died』, then I can't ignore this. I don't know whether Shelley would listen to me or not, but I think I need to tell her about it, depending on the results I get.

(I'm sure Shelley would want to avoid anything that would cause her to die, like me.)

Cordelia slowly stared at the stone statue of the evangelist and decided that she would definitely look for their diary the next time she goes to the Big Bookcase. Then, she heard the front door open.

She looked towards the door, and she saw Earl Zakharov and his attendant.

“Earl Zakharov. It’s rare for you to come two days in a row.”

Clarice said in surprise, before Cordelia could speak.

Earl Zakharov smiled in a friendly manner, like he had yesterday, and raised his hand.

“I got something rare today, so I came to invite Shelley out.”

“Something rare?”

“Yeah, a ticket to the circus. I heard that they show animals, birds and acrobats not seen in this area. Would you two like to come, Cordelia-san and Keighley-dono?”

Cordelia was a little surprised by the word, circus, and looked at the ticket in his hand. They were probably from the same troupe as the show Lara was talking about yesterday. However, the ticket itself was luxurious, and was definitely for good seats.

However, Clarice’s expression clouded over at Earl Zakharov’s invitation.

“Keighley-dono, do you not like animals?”

“That’s not it. I’m glad you invited me... but, I don’t want to get close to animals in the cat family.”

“Ah, that’s a shame. I hear they have a lot of large felines.”

“I’m very sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. My friend was going to go to the circus with his family, but he couldn’t, so he gave me these tickets.”

Earl Zakharov looked at Clarice as if it was too bad, and Cordelia shook her head.

“Mm, Earl. If you go with Shelley-san, then wouldn’t the other children be jealous?”

I know that he sees his late wife in her, but is he allowed to give her special treatment? If the ticket was for his friend’s family, then it wouldn’t be enough for all the children who live in this church.

(If possible, I don’t want Shelley to go to a place with lots of people...)

But the Earl continued to smile.

“I received a wonderful birthday present from Shelley the other day. This is thanks for that, so it should be fine.”

“Birthday present, you say?”

“I got a lovely flower. The priests will probably listen to my selfishness this once. But I think she’ll have more fun if she was with someone who is around her age. Keighley-dono can’t come, but how about you, Cordelia-san?”

If Earl Zakharov, who has had a close relationship with the church for years, says so, then it must be true. But I’m also worried about why he’s giving special treatment to one child. His special treatment towards Shelley will create discord among the children in the church and will create rifts.

(In any case... I can’t ignore this.)

Cordelia's wish won't come true if he wants to take Shelley out.

She glanced at Ronnie, and he looked as if he didn't care either way.

(Otou-sama didn't tell me I have to be careful around the Zakharov House.)

Then, there was only one answer.

"Then... if Shelley is going, then I will too."

Earl Zakharov smiled happily at Cordelia's reply.

◆◆◆◆◆

As Earl Zakharov had said, Shelley was given permission to go out.

Cordelia thought that she had done something terrible to Clarice, who had shown her around the church on her day off, but Clarice said, "I'm glad you'll be with them." Although Clarice might have her reasons, she might have been worried that she had refused an invitation from an Earl.

Afterwards, Shelley quickly greeted everyone before flying towards Earl Zakharov.

"Earl Zakharov! Are you really taking me to the circus!? I've never been to the circus!"

"Hello, Shelley-san."

She had dressed up a little in second-hand clothing that the Earl had donated to the children of the church. However, when the Earl told Cordelia about this, he said, "Actually, her clothes are new," so she knew that he favoured Shelley. *It's normal if he thinks she might be his daughter or wants to adopt her, but this is bothering me.*

"Are you looking forward to the circus?"

"Of course! But I'm sorry. I don't have any dreams to tell you today."

"I came to see you, so you don't have to worry about your dreams. Children should smile."

Shelley was the same as Cordelia and couldn't be considered as a child anymore, but she still seemed young to Earl Zakharov.

(She looks like an innocent child like that.)

There were many things about the Earl and Shelley that bothered her, and she couldn't relax. When her feelings grew heavier, Shelley finally noticed Cordelia.

"Oh, you're the girl from yesterday."

"Hello."

"It rained, right?"

Cordelia nodded at the unyielding girl. It seemed like her mood was bitter after Mick and the others angered her.

Shelley talked the whole time as the four sat in the carriage and headed to the circus.

She talked about being able to sing well, about being able to draw well, about finding lost items thanks to her dreams, and about receiving sweets in exchange for finding the objects.

She continued to talk, and Cordelia didn't even have room to interrupt. If Cordelia opened her mouth a little, then Shelley glared at her as if telling her to shut up.

(But she doesn't think she's Earl Clydereine's daughter at all, with the way she acts.)

She wants her fame to reach the Prince, so if she knows that Earl Clydereine is her Otou-sama, then she would happily go with him.

Is Shelley really Earl Clydereine's daughter, like she was in the game, or is she Earl Zakharov's daughter?

Cordelia hoped that she was Earl Clydereine's daughter, since Earl Zakharov didn't have enough power to protect Shelley.

"Hey... Hey, I said!"

"Huh?"

How long has she been calling for me? Cordelia raised her face when she heard Shelley's voice, and Shelley laughed happily.

"Hey, did you know that the church has a stained glass?"

"Yes. It depicts the encounter between the First King and the Saint. It's magical."

"Oh, you actually know a lot."

Cordelia laughed vaguely at Shelley who had uttered words that showed she was looking down on Cordelia.

(Even if Shelley wasn't the heroine, I might not be good at dealing with her.)

However, Shelley didn't care about how Cordelia acted and spoke loudly.

"I've been thinking. I'm sure the encounter between the First King and the Saint was a miracle, but their strong feelings created this kingdom. It's wonderful that I have the same power as the Saint!"

Shelley put her hands together and looked enticed, which made Cordelia shiver.

(Does she already think she's the same as the Saint?)

Although people have been talking about this on the streets, Cordelia never imagined that the person herself thought of herself as the Saint. She never imagined that Shelley would adore the Prince either.

“Say, Shelley-san. Why do you want to be of use to the Prince? Is it because you have the same power as the Saint?”

“Of course! But the Prince saved me once when I was little. I never thought that the person who saved me was the Prince, but I saw him in a dream afterwards. So I’m sure it was him.”

“In a dream? Wait, he saved you...?”

“I wanted to pay him back for saving me, and the Prince appeared in my dream. I was stunned to see that his elegant behaviour and gentle aura was still there. But if I want the Prince to look at me, then I have to be really incredible. I want to meet him soon!”

Cordelia was confused as the excited Shelley smiled.

The Prince saved her when she was younger? I’m sure there wasn’t a setting like that in the game. I don’t know if the person who helped her was really Sylvester-sama, but how did it happen?

“You want me to tell you? I won’t. This is a memory between the Prince and I.”

No, it doesn’t matter how she met him right now.

Rather, her thoughts are the problem.

(If the only difference between Shelley and the game 『Heroine』 was their personality, then I might have considered that she knew about this game and was reincarnated like me... but I don’t think she’s a reincarnated person.)

I can tell since she doesn’t think of Earl Clydereine as her Otou-sama, and, above all, it’s clear that she has no interest in Cordelia. If Shelley was someone who knew about the game, then she will probably change her expression, even if just subtly, when she met Cordelia, who will likely persecute her.

(If she was a reincarnated person who loved the Prince, then I could have supported her...)

However, even if her personality is different, I wanted her to be meeker. In the game, the personality of the game changed somewhat depending on the player’s selection, but Shelley doesn’t follow that settling now.

In front of Cordelia who gulped, Earl Zakharov laughed.

“You have to study hard too if you want to follow the same path as the Saint. The priests also tell you this, don’t they?”

“I might need to study, but I have the power of dreams, so I’ll be fine. If my dreams are strong, then I should be able to get better results than studying. Because I can see the future!”

The fear that Cordelia felt towards her declaration wasn’t just rejection. She genuinely believed that her power was special and righteous and that she can become special. It was terrifying.

“If your dream powers are wrong, would you be able to tell?”

She understood that this question would offend Shelley, but she had to ask it.

Sure enough, Shelley frowned.

“Why did you say that? Are you saying I’m wrong?!”

“I’m not. However, I was just wondering how you would show that your dreams are absolutely true.”

“Oh my, that’s easy. People who want to believe in my dreams can tell, and people who don’t are wrong, aren’t they?”

Shelley’s answer, which was full of confidence, did not give Cordelia the answer she wanted to hear. It was pointless to ask her any more questions now, and from what Cordelia had just heard, Shelley will follow her path in a parallel line.

(But one mistake can lead to her destroying her surroundings and herself.)

If Shelley is going to stick to her beliefs, then she needs to know the risks.

(I might have to tell her the risks if she doesn’t notice it herself.)

However, Cordelia didn’t want to put Shelley in a bad mood. *I don’t want to continue to incite her or be seen as an enemy either.*

I have to be patient right now. When she moved her fingertips, an unexpected voice reached her ears again.

“Dreams are only aids. It’s hard to gain confidence from people if you can’t convince them.”

“But I think it’s a game of numbers. If I can prove my powers, then everyone will believe in it, right?”

Earl Zakharov kindly informed Shelley, and she answered full of confidence. It was as if she was saying that Earl Zakharov should have known this.

(Which means she’s shown Earl Zakharov that her powers are always correct.)

But Cordelia was surprised by Earl Zakharov’s words.

Contrary to Shelley’s confidence, he had rebuked her twice.

(If the Earl is involved in her kidnapping, then it would be easier if he just agrees with her.)

My suspicion towards him might be groundless fear. If it is, then I’ll be happy, but...

“Oh, we’ve arrived.”

“Our journey in the carriage is over. It was fun! I felt like a Princess!”

Shelley said and rushed out the door before the coachman could open it. The Earl slowly followed after her.

Cordelia sighed in relief when they both got off the carriage. Even though they were still close, Shelley’s departure allowed her to relax a little.

“Say, Ojou-sama, are you under the weather? You usually wouldn’t just let her say something like that.”

“I’m fine. I didn’t argue because I couldn’t prove that her dreams are wrong. And, I was thinking because we decided to come in the spur of the moment, so I didn’t tell Otou-sama that I was going to come here.”

Cordelia immediately lied to Ronnie and then realised.

(That’s right. Her dreams indeed come true right now.)

Shelley isn’t the only one saying this. According to the rumours, she only tells fortunes that have no problems even if she’s wrong.

(I don’t want to get in the way of her wishes... but, I can’t help but wish that her dream powers don’t get any stronger. She has too much confidence in it and doesn’t even think there’s a slight chance they might be wrong.)

The heroine’s powers in the game were used to solve people’s troubles and weren’t directly related to the nation.

However, I don’t know if that was because 『she didn’t use it』 or because 『she couldn’t use it』 for that.

(If her wish does come true, then there’ll most likely be chaos.)

Whether it’s true or not, her statements which hold absolute confidence could bring disaster.

And, although I don’t know the truth behind the situation, I understand clearly that I’m not compatible with her. Perhaps, even if I’m not 『Cordelia』, I still wouldn’t be good at dealing with her.

“... I didn’t want to say this, but Master told me to let you do what you want as long as it’s not really dangerous. So, you don’t need to worry about not telling Master.”

“Oh my, really?”

“Yes, as long as you don’t do anything dangerous. On the other hand, I’m the one in charge of deciding whether it’s dangerous or not.”

Ronnie emphasised strangely, and Cordelia smiled wryly while getting off the carriage.

A large amount of land was necessary for the circus, so it was located some distance away from the town centre.

In addition to the spectators, there were many stalls selling souvenirs, and the place was as lively as a festival. They might be stalls, but they were actually temporary shops, so it looked as if it was a small shopping district.

(I miscalculated.)

I knew that the circus wasn’t aimed at nobles, since Lara said she was coming here, but I thought it was a calmer place, since Earl Zakharov had said he had received the ticket from his friend. However, the crowd is more intense than I imagined. We will immediately get lost if we act carelessly.

(Honestly, I'm more worried about her getting lost than about her getting kidnapped. It was the right choice to come with them.)

This crowd is too scary, since anything can happen. Cordelia decided to be careful, and Shelley shrieked beside her.

“Wow, there’s a big tent! And it smells delicious everywhere. And there are big animals over there! I wonder what that’s called?!”

“Sh-Shelley-san. The animals won’t run away, so please calm down.”

“Why?! Don’t tell me to calm down! Aren’t you acting a bit emotionless?!”

“Hmm, seriously, please wait!”

While holding onto Shelley’s clothes as Shelley moved to what attracted her, Cordelia desperately tried not to frown. If they made too much noise, then they would stand out in a bad way.

It might be difficult for Shelley to get kidnapped if she was bathed in attention, but Cordelia felt as if she heard people stifling their laughter. *This is really embarrassing.*

(We might be able to laugh it off if we were really commoners...)

Shelley is beautiful because she is the heroine.

Her clothes are close to those a noble girl would wear because Earl Zakharov gave them to her. In other words, she looks like a noble girl. That’s why her actions can give a negative impression to those around her, and they would think, ‘Why is she acting like that? Whose House does she belong to?’

And, my reputation will be damaged, not Shelley’s, because she hasn’t entered noble society yet. Even if I wasn’t acting the way she is, I would probably be recognised just by accompanying her. People will notice that I’m from the Pameradia House because of my red eyes, which will cause trouble for Otou-sama. That can’t happen.

But then she realised something when she looked around.

(But aren’t there only a few nobles here?)

It wasn’t like there weren’t any upper-class people in the crowd, but there was considerably less than she had thought. Cordelia looked around curiously to find out why this was. Then, she found on a signboard nearby that performances for noble were performed at night.

(Oh, I see. In this case, most nobles will visit at night.)

In this kingdom, plays were usually performed at night, so people didn’t go to the theatre in the daytime when nothing was on. Nobles in this kingdom know that people in foreign kingdoms go to the theatre in the day too, but they choose to go at night.

(But then, why did Earl Zakharov’s friend decide to purchase tickets for the daytime?)

It might be difficult to take Shelley out at night. But the ticket wasn't something Earl Zakharov had bought, he had said that his friend gave it to him. I can't say it's bizarre since I can see other nobles around, but why did they conveniently get tickets for the daytime show?

(I wonder if I'm overthinking.)

"Hey, do we have time to see that stall over there? I'm curious because there's a lot of sparkly things!"

"Hmm, Shelley-san, please calm down a bit..."

Shelley interrupted Cordelia's thoughts with her loud voice and pulled on Cordelia's clothes again. But, it was difficult for her to ponder too much since Shelley was running all over the place. Even if she had asked Earl Zakharov about the tickets, Shelley would probably interrupt them.

Earl Zakharov slowly put his hands on Shelley's shoulders.

"Shelley-san, I'll ask you too. Please calm down a little, alright?"

Cordelia was relieved to hear he supported her. Whether Shelley would calm down or not, she has listened to Earl Zakharov. Cordelia thought Shelley would calm down...

"We still have time until they start the performance. If you don't rush and decide what stalls you want to visit, then we can go look at a few. Where do you want to go first?"

———— But Cordelia had just imagined things.

Shelley heard what Earl Zakharov had said, and raised her voice cheerfully.

"Then, I want to see the sparkly things over there! And, that crowded place over there. I'm excited to see what they're doing over there."

"Then, where do you want to go first? Oh, how about that beads stall over there? Can you see it?"

Maybe the Earl hadn't done this for Shelley and he just wanted to see beads? After hearing the friendly conversation, Cordelia felt uncomfortable as if she was the third-wheel.

"Ojou-sama, what will you do?"

"We'll go with them since that child might get lost with just the Earl around. If anything happens, then we'll be troubled."

If Cordelia can keep her from being kidnapped, then that was what she wanted to do. She was here on the lookout. Leaving Shelley was nothing short of abandoning her decision.

"Well, it is crowded. There are a lot of rude people who pickpocket in places like these. Please be careful since you look like a normal beautiful lady at a glance instead of a naughty one."

"... It certainly is easy for suspicious people to slip into the crowds."

Cordelia agreed while pretending that she hadn't heard everything Ronnie had said.

“Well, I don’t think you need to be too careful. This is probably your first time in such a crowd, but it’s a lot better than it was at the Founding Festival.”

“I see.”

There’s a lot of people here now, but how crowded was the Founding Festival? Cordelia was relieved that it wasn’t as crowded as the Founding Festival as she stared at Earl Zakharov and Shelley chatting while picking up items from the stall.

Cordelia was staring at them with Ronnie a short distance away from the stall because she didn’t want to get in the way of the other guests.

“They might be related, but they don’t seem like father and daughter.”

“Really?”

“Do they look like they’re father and daughter to you, Ojou-sama?”

“Honestly, no.”

Ronnie went quiet after he heard Cordelia’s reply and shrugged.

However, her opinion was based on the information she had gained from the game, so it lacked objectivity. Thus, she was a little surprised that Ronnie felt this way in such a little time.

“Why do you think that way, Ronnie?”

“Because the Earl lets her do whatever she wants. Even if he rebukes her, he doesn’t stick his foot down so that she will listen, right? I know that he’ll be troubled if she doesn’t like him, but he’s looking down on her. It might be fine now, but if she really becomes his relative... or even gets adopted by him, then he’ll continue to treat her like a customer.”

Ronnie’s comment sounded harsher than usual because he was tired of listening to the interactions between Earl Zakharov and Shelley. Cordelia felt terrible for making him accompany her when he was tired of them as she recalled the interactions between Earl Zakharov and Shelley.

Earl Zakharov had earned a lot of money in the marine industry even if he isn’t in that business anymore. *It’s unlikely that he doesn’t know how to interact with people*, Cordelia thought. Shelley left the store and hurried back to where Cordelia was. *What does she want?* Cordelia tilted her head, and Shelley suddenly pulled her hand.

“Hey, you.”

“Woah!”

“Woah, what...? You surprised me! Don’t surprise me.”

I’m the one who was surprised.

“Shelley-san, what happened? Where is Earl Zakharov?”

“The Earl is talking to some people at the stall. So, I thought I had a bit of time and came to talk to you.”

“To me?”

“This is my pocket money. Can I buy a nice gift for the Earl with this?”

Cordelia wondered what Shelley was going to say, and widened her eyes in surprise.

“Come on, answer. The Earl’s nearly done.”

“Eh, yes. Let’s see...”

But, the amount of money Shelley had was only enough to buy a piece of candy. It wasn’t enough to buy a gift for the Earl. *Shelley probably asked me because she couldn’t find a gift that she could buy with her money.*

(Hmm, I know that feelings are important when giving gifts.)

However, her budget is too low.

But, she won’t accept it even if I tell her this.

“Hey, isn’t there anything I can buy?”

“The Earl was happy that you gave him flowers before.”

“I can’t get flowers that can only be bought in stores. I won’t use money if I can pick them.”

“Then, how about wrapping paper and ribbons to decorate the flowers with? I’m sure he’ll be happy if you decorate the flowers that you picked with ribbons and wrapping paper.”

Shelley thought a little about Cordelia’s proposal.

“... That’s not the answer I was expecting. I thought you would know a lot of things since you’re dressed beautifully. But, alright. It’s not a bad idea. I’ll try it.”

I feel like she spoke ill of me when she’s supposed to thank me, but it seems like she accepted my idea.

(I wonder if domineering refers to someone like this.)

I wonder if she doesn’t respect the people she talks to because she has a lot of confidence in herself. She shows kindness sometimes, but her attitude makes it hard to tell.

(But at this rate, she’ll just be conceited.)

How can I get her to notice that, Cordelia thought, and Shelley walked pass Cordelia.

“Shelley-san, where are you going?”

“I’m going to look for wrapping paper and ribbons! I’ll be back right away, so tell the Earl that!”

“You can’t go by yourself! It’ll be troublesome if you get lost in this crowd of people!!”

“Then, find me if I get lost! I have to go buy it now!”

Cordelia had expected this, but Shelley didn’t stop even when Cordelia tried to stop her.

Ronnie also thought it wasn't a good idea, so he tried to grab her, but she lightly dodged when she saw his hand... then she bumped into someone who was passing by.

"Oops, are you alright, Ojou-san?"

"Eh, yes."

Shelley had bumped into a tall and muscular man who had a stubble. The man confirmed that Shelley hadn't fallen over and smiled.

"It's good for kids to have a lot of energy, but you should be careful. I heard what you guys were talking about. We have wrapping paper and ribbons at my general store. Do you want to come see?"

"Yes! See, I found a shop. I'll be back right away! Will you guys be waiting for the Earl here?"

"Shelley-san, I said you can't go..."

"Argh, shut up! I said I'll be back right away, didn't I?!"

Shelley had already turned her back and wasn't listening to what Cordelia said at all. Cordelia panicked and looked towards the stall that the Earl was at, but he was already inside.

(You'd normally think that that person would kidnap you! He doesn't have the appearance of someone who manages a general store!)

People who did business in places like this wouldn't have an appearance that drove customers away.

"Ronnie, do you think we can find the Earl later if we leave?"

"In the worst case, we'll just meet up with him at the entrance. Things have gotten like this, so we can't just ignore it."

Cordelia and Ronnie babbled before chasing after Shelley and the man. The man turned around and laughed a little.

"Hmm? I don't need you two. Ojou-san, run."

"We're running?"

"Yeah. Well, I'll carry you so we won't be late."

The man said before lifting Shelley like she was a bag of rice, then he ran into an alley.

(That's obviously not an attitude one would use towards a customer. Why is she not struggling?!)

However, Cordelia noticed that Shelley's behaviour was strange. It probably felt uncomfortable being held like that, but she wasn't reacting at all.

Did he put her to sleep with a drug? This is already a crime.

"Ojou-sama, I'll go ahead!"

"Okay!"

The man wasn't running very fast, so Ronnie should be able to catch up if he dashed in a straight line, but the narrow alley was stacked with wooden boxes from the stalls. The pile of boxes occasionally collapsed because the man was running all over the place, and got in the way of Ronnie's chase. Ronnie got rid of the boxes with magic every time, but the man got furtherer away from them because it took time to get rid of the boxes. Even so, Ronnie can catch up to the man if he ran with all his might, and no matter how far the man ran, he couldn't get that far away from Cordelia.

(If it was a bit easier to run...!)

Cordelia had trained herself a little after the Flora Silk incident, but she was reaching her limit.

Still, she clenched her teeth and continued to run, then she saw that there was a lot of dust in the surrounding buildings. After a while, Ronnie gradually slowed down and signalled Cordelia with his left hand. The man had stopped.

Ronnie turned around, raised his index finger to his lips and signalled her to be quiet.

Cordelia nodded, and Ronnie slowly approached the building from the other side.

(He has comrades, so he's obviously a hoodlum.)

Two other men, who had similar appearances, to the first was already there.

They looked around before entering the vacant building.

"That doesn't look like a shop."

"You're right. I want to call the knights, but I'm worried about that girl. Can't we do something?"

"Understood. But, Ojou-sama, you're really good friends with trouble. Do you want to get exorcised?"

"Let's see, I'll think about it."

Ronnie had spoken frivolously, but he had already began concentrating. He was squinting his eyes more than usual so that he could see the flow of magic from within.

"Ojou-sama, I'm going inside for a moment, so don't act on your own. You absolutely can't act on your own."

"Of course not. Are there three people inside apart from Shelley-san?"

"That's right. If one of them gets out, can you stop him? But you can't let him see you or get close to him."

"Okay."

"Then, I'm going now!"

Cordelia waited quietly on the spot for Ronnie to rush out in victory. She also prepared the seed which she carried at all times for support, but the noisy room went quiet straight away, and she didn't need to use the seed.

Ronnie completely his job skilfully like he always did, and when she popped her head out, he beckoned her to come to him.

"I tied them up with what I could find for the time being. The girl's sleeping, but there's not really anything wrong with her. So, I'm going to launch the reinforcement signal to call for help."

"You had something like that?"

"Well, I do, or rather I made it... It makes a blasting sound, and white smoke rises from it, so someone should come. I really want to call for help secretly, but I can't leave Ojou-sama and the hoodlums behind. I made it because I thought I would be troubled if I encountered a situation like this... but I didn't want to use it if I could avoid it."

It sounded almost like fireworks from Ronnie's explanation. Fireworks weren't something common in this world, so people will realise that something unusual had happened, and someone on patrol will come.

"You're making a complicated face."

"Something is bothering me."

"There are traces that they were staying here, but there's no evidence that shows they had kidnapped other children. Or perhaps I should say, it hasn't been long since they made this their base. However, is something else bothering you, Ojou-sama?"

"Yes, quite a few things."

I've stopped Shelley's kidnapping this time, but the thing Ghost told me about probably hasn't been resolved. If what he had told me was about this incident, then the kidnappers couldn't have gone ahead with their plan unless they knew that she would be out. It would be difficult for them to ambush her even if they knew she was going out beforehand.

(If the information was leaked out beforehand, then it can only be from Earl Zakharov.)

It's possible that he spoke about this to an acquaintance, or that someone eavesdropped on him. But, he said he received the ticket from his friend today, so would he even have time to tell other people about his outing? Would the Earl even tell people that he's taking a town girl to the circus?

(If he did tell someone, then it would only be to those close to him.)

Cordelia distrusted Earl Zakharov more than she doubted him.

But even so, I can't conclude that Earl Zakharov was involved in this because it was too crude.

(Either way, she'll be put under the protection of the knights.)

I don't know how long she will be under protection for, but she'll at least be protected while they investigate this matter.

(And, can I call this a blessing in disguise? I can use this to talk to Otou-sama. I should be close to solving this.)

With Shelley's safety guaranteed, Cordelia had to first settle the suspicions she held towards Earl Zakharov.

“But we’ll have to go to the castle again now.”

“Huh?”

“We have to explain what happened, don’t we?”

That’s really upsetting.

“You didn’t do anything dangerous, so I don’t think they’ll get mad at you... Probably. Let’s say the girl was acting a bit dangerously, we couldn’t stop her and so we followed her. Is that alright?”

They agreed on the same story. *I’ll do my best, so I can quickly go home*, Cordelia vowed as she watched the knights come due to Ronnie’s rescue signal.

Act 51: False Good Deeds and Sincere Diligence

Translator: Blushy

Editor: SenjiQ

When Ronnie briefly explained the situation to a knight who had arrived at the scene, they were told to go to the castle like he had expected.

Before moving to the castle, Cordelia told one of the knights that Earl Zakharov might be looking for them, and asked the knight to look for Earl Zakharov.

When they were about to head to the castle, Shelley woke up, but she was really excited to hear that she could enter the castle before she even grasped her own situation.

Therefore, she was more excitable than she was at the circus while they were travelling and while they were waiting to be interviewed.

“Wow, I’m in a real castle! I’ve always wanted to come here! I wonder if I can meet the Prince by chance. I wonder if I’ll be able to see him if I go out into the corridor.”

Cordelia wanted to sigh deeply at Shelley’s excitement, but she held it in. *I’m glad you’re not traumatised by the kidnapping, but I want you to think about why this happened. If this happens again, what will you do?*

Ronnie was being interviewed first, so only Cordelia and Shelley were here.

“Shelley-san, please stop following people you don’t know from now on.”

“Argh, I know!”

No, that’s the typical response of someone who doesn’t understand. In fact, you’re not reflecting at all since you even secretly added, ‘I’m finally having fun’.

(I wonder if this child won’t listen to anyone unless it’s the Prince who she admires.)

But, if Shelley meets Sylvester-sama, then she’ll be more excited than she is now and won’t be able to talk.

And, one more thing. Shelley is really pushy, and it feels like she’s the in-game 『Cordelia』 instead of the 『Heroine』.

She won’t listen to anyone, she has absolute confidence in herself, and her attachment to the Prince——.

Once she started thinking about it, everything seemed to overlap, and Cordelia shook her head a little. *There are many problems with Shelley’s behaviour and speech, but if she is a noble’s daughter, then it’s possible she’ll be educated, and her behaviour and speech will improve. Although, it may be hard to change her fundamental thoughts.*

“Oh? Shelley-san, did you drop this?”

Cordelia had found a small bag rolling at Shelley's feet, so she stood up and picked it up. The sachet was about the size of the aroma bags that Cordelia had previously made for the children in Oulu Village, and the string which was used to hang it around Shelley's neck had unfastened. The fabric was also worn out because it had been used for a long time.

Shelley looked surprised, then she snatched the bag away from Cordelia.

"Oh, thanks! I can't lose this!"

"Huh? Um, I'm glad I saw it then."

Cordelia widened her eyes because it was the first time Shelley had thanked her.

"Can I ask what it is?"

"You can. This is a memento that my mum gave me. She said that I'll be happy if I have this," she said while retying the unfastened part of the string, then she wore it on her neck and hid it under her clothes. *It seems to be a charm that she always carries.*

(Perhaps...)

Cordelia gulped and stared at the bag.

"What is inside of the charm?"

"I really don't want to show it to you, but... it's a small ring. You picked it up for me, so I'll show it to you."

Shelley was in a good mood, and what she took out of the bag wasn't a small ring... it was an ear cuff. The surface was a little cloudy, but there was a small bird pattern engraved on it.

"This is...!"

"Huh? Do you know this bird?"

"Yes. Say, have you ever shown this to the priests?"

"Nope. The priests told me that charms shouldn't be opened."

I see so that's why they couldn't identify her so far.

Cordelia breathed out slowly and then looked straight at Shelley.

"This is the Clydereine House's crest."

"Cly... derine?? What's that?"

"Earl Clydereine's House. I don't know why your mother had something like this, but maybe Earl Clydereine might know."

Cordelia explained since it looked like Shelley didn't get it, and Shelley jumped.

"What?! This is the crest of an Earl!? I only know Earl Zakharov's name!"

“Earl Zaharov’s crest is also a bird, but, if I’m not mistaken, it’s a seabird. That’s a dove. There are olive branches on the ear cuff, so I’m probably right.”

Cordelia carefully chose her words in front of Shelley, who was confused. She couldn’t say that they were parent and child just because Shelley had a reasonably expensive ear cuff with an elaborate design, but they do have some kind of connection.

“I don’t know why your mother had that, but I might be able to find out. Do you want to know?”

“I am curious... But, does this really belong to that... what’s his face Earl?”

“No one would make a fake with a noble’s crest. Misrepresentation of social status is a crime.”

Shelley stared at the ear cuff when she heard what Cordelia had said. But her confusion gradually faded, and her eyes began to shine.

“Hey, if this belongs to that Earl, then I’ll be acquainted with him, and I can show the Earls my power, right? If that happens, then it’ll surely give me a chance to get closer to the Prince! Earl Zakharov won’t advertise my powers, but the other Earl might!”

Even though she had hinted that she could acquaint herself with Earl Clydereine, she still didn’t seem to realise that he could be her father.

(I heard from Isma-oniisama that Earl Clydereine and Otou-sama aren’t on good terms, but he did say that they can talk, so it shouldn’t be impossible to make contact with him.)

If I can tell him that there’s a young girl with an ear cuff that has the Clydereine crest on it, then I can leave the decision making to him. I doubt the Earl would forget who he gave the ear cuff to.

“Shelley-san, can you keep this a secret? We need to investigate this, but the investigation won’t progress if there’s confusion.”

“Really? Well then, investigate quickly.”

Shelley seemed a little unhappy, but she couldn’t let the chance slip away, so she didn’t say anything else to Cordelia except for her to rush. Furthermore, her unhappy expression had already changed to a happy one, and she was already on cloud nine.

(But the problem is how long can she keep silent? I have to hurry.)

At least, Cordelia hoped that she would keep quiet about it until tomorrow, any more than that worried Cordelia. *In any case, it doesn’t change the fact that I have to hurry*, the moment Cordelia thought that she was called to another room.

When Cordelia entered the room being used for interviews, there were two knights there, and one of them was her brother, Isma.

“I didn’t think we would talk here... but I heard about what happened from Ronnie. It was a disaster.”

Isma seemed a little troubled as he laughed. He was probably showing consideration towards her.

“But I have to make sure that the details match up. Can you talk about it?”

“Yes.”

First, she talked about how she visited the church and was invited by Earl Zakharov to go to the circus with Shelley. Then, when Shelley and Cordelia were talking in the plaza, a suspicious man came and tried to take Shelley away, so she followed them. Isma and the other knight wrote down what she had said.

“Did you notice anything else?”

“I thought it wasn’t something so simple since he had kidnapped her in front of her companions. He did lure her with goods at first, but after that, he acted a little too pushy. I don’t think he would have aimed for her if he just wanted to kidnap anyone.”

“Then, do you think she was targeted?”

“No, I think it was too unnatural. She had only just decided that she would go out. The only person who knew that she would be at the circus was the person who invited her, Earl Zakharov, but he also invited me, Ronnie, and Clarice Keighley, a knight.”

“He invited Keighley-dono?”

“He did. Me aside, I don’t think he would invite a knight and a magician from the Pameradia House if he was planning to kidnap her.”

“Thanks. I’ll use that as a reference,”

Isma said and sighed. Then he whispered, “It’s the same as what Ronnie had said.”

“And, this isn’t directly related to the disturbance, but why were you at the circus? Even if you were invited, you could have refused since it was a sudden invitation.”

“That girl’s name is Shelley, and she’s a very hyper girl. I worried that she would get lost if only she and the Earl went.”

“I see, you couldn’t ignore that fact. But she wasn’t kidnapped thanks to that. That child was lucky.”

I think I might have been able to lie to him about Ghost with that, but what shall I do now?

If possible, I want to talk to Onii-sama about Shelley, but I don’t want others to hear us. A child having the crest of the Clydereine House is a very delicate topic. That’s why I told her not to tell anyone.

“Oh, that’s right. I heard about the hoodlum’s hideout, but I forgot to ask them about where they’re from. A map of the plaza... isn’t very detailed. I’ll go get another one.”

“Then, I’ll go get it, so please wait with your little sister.”

“Sorry, thanks.”

Isma thanked the knight who was leaving the room and sighed as soon as the door was closed.

“Now, it’s only the two of us. I’ll listen to what you have to say, now.”

“I’m sorry.”

From what Isma had said, he had cleared out the room so that they would be alone. She felt terrible that she was taking up more time, but she was grateful that he realised she had something to say.

“No, it’s fine. So, what did you want to say?”

“I just found this out, but Shelley has an ear cuff with the Clydereine crest on it. Can you tell this to Earl Clydereine?”

“Something with a crest...?”

“Yes. It’s her mother’s memento, but she doesn’t know how she got it.”

“Alright. Earl Clydereine did get ear cuffs made, but that’s not strange... but, she was given something very personal.”

Isma also strongly felt that Shelley was related to Earl Clydereine in some way.

“But, if she is, then she’s in a pretty complicated position. So then, the girl they were trying to kidnap is the Dreamer Girl, and she’s also somehow connected to Earl Clydereine? I’ll be glad if the kidnappers confess everything quickly. By the way, what do you think of the Dreamer Girl, Cordelia?”

“What do you mean?”

“Your impression of her. What do you think of her as a person?”

“She seems to adore the Prince from the bottom of her heart. I don’t know if those feelings are love or admiration. She also has a lot of confidence in herself, and she doesn’t listen to others when they reprimand her.”

“So, she’s a child who does things that need reprimanding.”

Cordelia smiled wryly when Isma made a face saying ‘you’ve done a great job’.

She was sad that she couldn’t deny that, but there was no point in glossing things over to her brother.

“I’ll tell Earl Clydereine. I’ll report it to father too, but it’s probably better for me to mediate this matter. If he hears it from father, then the Earl would put up his guard too much.”

Isma’s wry smile hinted how bad the relationship was between Elvis and Earl Clydereine. Isma was better at things like that, since he was amiable.

“Thank you very much, Onii-sama.”

“I don’t mind. It may not be directly related to the kidnapping, but if she has nothing to do with Earl Clydereine then he would just ignore it, and if she is related to him, then he might owe me one.”

With a smile, Isma didn’t hide his true feelings, and Cordelia smiled a little.

“Now then, it’s about time my colleague comes back. Do you have anything else you want to secretly tell me?”

“No, I’ve told you all I can for now.”

“Alright. Then, you’ll have to deal with father when you get home.”

When Isma said that, a knock sounded at the door. Cordelia gulped because they had barely finished talking in time, but Isma continued to smile.

(Onii-sama is so amazing.)

It was her first time seeing him work, but she couldn’t help but think that he was living in the world of adults just like Elvis and Cyrus.



After the interview, Ronnie and Cordelia went home. Then, Emina gave her a letter addressed to her. She turned the letter around and saw a wax seal of a seabird at the back. It was from Earl Zakharov.

When Cordelia went back to her room, she changed clothes and opened the letter.

He wrote that he wanted to invite Cordelia and Shelley to his mansion as an apology for getting them involved in the kidnapping incident.

“A tea party to apologise, huh? I don’t think it’s Earl Zakharov’s fault though.”

However, that’s only if the Earl isn’t involved in this incident. I’ll have to reply since he’s sent a written invitation.

She thought that, and there was a knock at her door.

“Come in.”

“Pardon me. Ojou-sama, Master will be coming home early today.”

“Okay.”

Cordelia put the letter on the desk after she’d responded to Emina. *I don’t have to write a reply straight away. I have to report to Otou-sama first.*

Cordelia gave a long sigh because the things she had to report increased by one.

Usually, when Elvis said he was coming home early, he would get home a little later than dinner time. Thus, Cordelia thought he would be home around that time today too, but he came home much earlier and even called her to have dinner with him.

Elvis was still dressed in the clothes he wore when he came back from the castle.

“I heard you came to the castle today too.”

“Yes.”

“I’ve heard most of it from Isma, but I want you to give me an explanation too.”

It seems like he’s already heard the gist of things.

Cordelia said the same things that she had told Isma.

“Even if that girl is short-tempered, I didn’t think you would accompany Earl Zakharov.”

“I’m sorry. But I haven’t heard that Earl Zakharov was a particularly careful person, so I went with them.”

She informed straight Elvis the reason why she had accompanied them straight away, but he gave a deep sigh in reply.

“I heard that girl has the Clydereine House’s crest.”

“Yes.”

“Normally, it’s unimaginable for someone to give ear cuffs to a servant. If they didn’t steal it, then they’re probably a relative or something. I’m leaving this matter to Isma, but you got to know a girl like her?”

Elvis’s expression gradually grew bitter.

Why is he making an expression like that? Cordelia questioned, and thought of something terrible.

(I want to believe that’s not the case... but he’s not thinking that Shelley would be my rival for the position of the Queen, right?)

Cyrus-oniisama declared that there aren’t any merits to me marrying into the royal family.

But Otou-sama hadn’t told me that directly. However, it shouldn’t be a problem since he hadn’t brought that topic up ever since I declared that I didn’t want to marry the Prince.

(No, no. That must never happen!)

Once she started thinking about this matter, she couldn’t stop, and desperately tried to calm down the fear that had arisen within her. She was on the verge of trembling.

Before long, the words she heard were utterly different from the ones she had expected.

“... They got you involved.”

Elvis grumbled slightly.

His voice sounded as if he was protesting against the damage she had suffered, and Cordelia went blank.

(Come to think of it, Otou-sama didn’t ask me about the time when I met the Prince either.)

If he wants me to marry His Highness, then it wouldn’t be strange for him to ask what we talked about.

Can I take that as him thinking my marriage into the royal family is unnecessary like Cyrus-oniisama does? She wanted to ask him straight away, but she hesitated because the current conversation would be skipped. *We should clear the matter about Shelley first.*

However, his words indicated that he treasured her a lot, so it made her happy.

(It’s not related to the Pameradia House’s reputation, but he still got angry.)

I already know he treasures me, but it makes me happy that he’s showing it again.

“It seems like they don’t know much about the kidnapping yet. But the ones you captured are probably not the main offenders; rather, they are people who can be discarded.”

“Otou-sama, I have something to talk to you about that. To tell you the truth, Earl Zakharov has sent me an invitation for a tea party as an apology for today. The girl I mentioned earlier, Shelley-san, is also invited to this tea party.”

“Tea party?”

Cordelia nodded while listening to Elvis’s sharp tone.

“I haven’t written him a reply yet. But, before that... I’ve looked into Earl Zakharov a little, and I thought a few things were strange. I’ve heard that Earl Zakharov’s income plummeted due to his ships being wrecked, but it seems like he’s more prosperous than before.”

“If you’re talking about his welfare work, then it’s simple. He’s just consuming his fortune and turning it into gold.”

Cordelia widened her eyes because Elvis had answered so easily.

“I also researched to see if he was doing anything illegally. But he seems to have levelled his savings to keep face. When he lost his ship, he could have bought another if it wasn’t the latest model. But, he hadn’t done that, and a lot of servants saw that he was spending his money lavishing, so they quit since they were worried about their futures. As a result, I heard that he hardly has any servants left.”

Cordelia widened her eyes at what Elvis had said.

“That’s...”

Is that a noble’s pride? There are times when appearances matter, but he might have too enthusiastic about spending money that even his servants were worried.

“Publically, Earl Zakharov isn’t a harmful person right now. He’s just a fool who can’t face reality, but he doesn’t seem like he would hatch a plan and deceive people. He’s not someone who can put together a plan. He doesn’t have much interest in politics, so I never get involved with him.”

Is that why he wasn’t included in the Houses I should be careful of? Cordelia thought, and Elvis turned his sharp gaze onto her.

“Remember the difference between pride and delusions.”

“Yes.”

However, Elvis quietened his voice a little.

“But there is something that’s bothering me. When I looked into him, his property should have already reached the limit, but you said that he hasn’t changed his behaviour. He probably doesn’t have any collateral left to borrow money. But he doesn’t seem like he’s panicking.”

He declared and looked back at Cordelia.

“If you’re going to the tea party, then pay attention to see if you feel uncomfortable in any way.”

Elvis was saying he was worried, but he didn’t mind if she went. He told her the Earl’s circumstances, and that she should be on the lookout.

(Isn’t this his first command to me?)

In contrast to Cordelia’s surprise, Elvis was indifferent.

“But don’t search too deeply. All the more if you think he has something to do with the kidnapping of that town girl.”

“I understand, Otou-sama.”

I don't know if I will produce any results.

But, if Otou-sama expects that I can do this, then I have to respond to his expectations.

Hence, I need to reply to Earl Zakharov at once.

(But we have to eat before that.)

Cordelia thought as she headed to the dining room with Elvis.

◆◆◆◆◆

Three days later, Cordelia headed to Earl Zakharov’s mansion with Ronnie at the allocated time. Usually, Emina would accompany her to tea parties, but Ronnie already knew Earl Zakharov, so it shouldn’t be a problem for him to accompany her.

Earl Zakharov’s mansion was a quiet place.

The garden, made up of pruned evergreen trees and stone statues, maintained a beautiful balance, and looked elegant. However, she felt like the plants were complaining that they were lonely.

“It’s a quiet mansion. It seems like people are hiding their presence.”

“You’re right.”

Cordelia and Ronnie got off the carriage in front of the entrance while whispering to each other. They were invited into the mansion by a servant, and Ronnie was guided to a separate room, as was usual with tea parties. Attendants waited in a separate room until the end of the tea party, but Ronnie would have to wait alone, since Shelley didn’t have any attendants.

Cordelia, on the other hand, was guided to a room on the second floor, which was strange.

Tea parties were often held in sunny rooms on the first floor or in the garden, but according to the servant, Shelley had asked for a room located in a high position, since it would have a better view.

Earl Zakharov was already waiting in the room.

“Hey, Cordelia-san. Thanks for coming.”

“Thank you for inviting me, Earl Zakharov.”

There was a lot of light in the room she was guided to. However, on the other hand, she felt the same loneliness from this room as she had in the garden. It may have been related to how dreary the room was.

Cordelia felt complicated feelings, since the arrangement of the room gave off a hollow feeling, instead of being simple. She knew that just having decorations didn't make it a nice room, but if Earl Zakharov was a show-off, like Elvis had said he was, then he would have decorated the room a little when he invited guests to it. *Did he not have enough money to do that?*

"I sent someone to get Shelley-san, but it seems like they'll be late."

"Oh my, then I should have gone to pick her up."

Shelley stayed in the castle until late, on the day of the kidnapping incident, but she had returned to the church afterwards.

However, Isma had told her that she already has a Clydereine House magician as her guard, and they have already begun to identify her using magic. Isma said that Earl Clydereine had done that because he was almost convinced that she was his blood relative.

"I can't let guests do that. I'll be happy if you could take a seat and wait."

"Then, pardon me."

Cordelia slowly sat down, and Earl Zakharov spoke again.

"I'm really sorry for the trouble I caused by suddenly inviting you two out. I've done something awful."

"It's fine, you don't have to worry about it."

"No, I do. If you hadn't been there, then Shelley-san would have gone missing. Thanks, Cordelia-san."

"No, I... It's because Ronnie was there."

"Ah, Ronnie-kun, yes? I thought he would be strong, since he's your guard... but I really can't thank him enough. The magicians at the Pameradia House are amazing."

Earl Zakharov smiled and stated, but Cordelia felt uncomfortable.

He said he can't thank Ronnie enough, but he didn't invite Ronnie here. Ronnie said this way is better for him, but why didn't the Earl invite Ronnie to the tea party when he interacts with commoners a lot? Although he's Shelley's patron, she's still a commoner right now.

(I wonder if Earl Zakharov knows that Shelley may be connected to the Clydereine house.)

I told Shelley to keep quiet about that, but if he saw the Clyderine magician at the church, then it wouldn't be strange for him to know.

“Shelley isn’t here yet, but I feel like putting something in my mouth, so why don’t I get tea prepared?”

“Thank you very much. But, before that... Even though it had been urgent, I’m sorry for suddenly disappearing like that.”

“That’s fine. I was surprised when I realised you both were gone, but I received your message from the knight.”

“I see.”

“I was looking at an acquaintance’s shop. I was browsing too many items in there.”

Cordelia felt strange again by Earl Zakharov’s words.

Earl Zakharov seems to prioritise Shelley’s wishes, but he forgot about her because he was so focused on things he liked?

“Were you looking at things to gift to Shelley-san?”

“That’s right. But it looks like I’ll have to give her a congratulations present.”

It seems like Earl Zakharov has been informed about her possible relation to Earl Clydereine.

“Have you already heard about it?”

“Yesterday, I waited for Shelley-san at the church until night time, but she was with a Clydereine House magician. I asked what was going on, and the magician told me that she might be related to Earl Clydereine. I was so surprised,” Earl Zakharov said, as he smiled a little.

“If she’s related to the Clydereine House, then she wouldn’t be related to me. That’s a shame, but we’ll have the opportunity to meet each other in the future. It’s an honour to be able to get along with her.”

“Really?”

“Besides, she brought us together. I got to know you because of her. I might ask if I can borrow Ronnie, who can suppress three men in the blink of an eye by himself.”

The Earl joked, and Cordelia smiled as she tilted her head.

My doubts are still there, but I’m sure of one thing.

“Earl, can I ask you something? Is Shelley-san here?”

“She’s not... Why do you think she is?”

“How did you find out that three men tried to kidnap her? The only people that know that is me, Ronnie and the knights. We have to report it immediately if there is an insolent person who leaked information outside, but when did you hear about it, since you were at the church until night time?”

Cordelia smiled and the Earl widened his eyes. Then, he smiled.

“You’re really smart. No, I was careless since I was happy.”

“I think you’ve talked quite a bit, even though you say I’m smart. Why did you try to kidnap Shelley? And, why are you happy?”

He could get his hands on Shelley, even if he hadn't tried to kidnap her. If Cordelia hadn't tried to influence the relationship between Shelley and Earl Clydereine, then it would have been better for Earl Zakharov to make a move after he got his hands on her.

But Earl Zakharov remained calm.

"Even I know that there are people after Shelley. There was someone who offered me a completion bonus because I had a relationship with her."

"Then..."

"However, his offer wasn't appealing to me. Sure, he had offered a lot of money, but I'm not after money, and I don't think I can buy what I want with that amount."

Earl Zakharov continued, and it didn't seem like he was lying.

"What is it you want?"

"I want commendation."

"Commendation?"

"Yes. Commendation that can be bought with money disappears in an instant. But I found out from a certain man... that I had an opportunity to talk with you, Cordelia-san. So, I accepted his proposal."

"With me?"

Cordelia knitted her eyebrows because he had suddenly said her name, but Earl Zakharov looked happy as he continued eloquently.

"I've always known about you. You're famous among my circle. When you were under 10, you educated the children in your fief, and you collected noble children and conducted charity work. So, you know how pleasant it is to be admired, right? No, there's no point in living if I'm not admired. The more I give, the more thanks I get in return. The happiness I get from that can't be substituted for anything else."

"So, what does that have to do with what you want to talk to me about?"

"This."

Earl Zakharov said as he put a small potted plant on the table.

"What is this?"

"It's a herb that fascinates people. It gives people pleasure and fun hallucinations... No, it can even make you see dreams."

"So, it's a narcotic."

"It's just grass like this, so it needs to be processed."

Cordelia also researched narcotics to find out about dangerous herbs, but she didn't recognise the herb that he had presented. It looked like flax, but it had several different traits than flax, such as red leaves.

“This is a plant from the north, but it’s a good plant and grows anywhere. But, it’s hard for me to raise a lot of them by myself. That man told me that Cordelia-san is interested in all kinds of herbs, so you’ll definitely help me if I can get to know you.”

Cordelia glared at Earl Zakharov when she heard the word ‘north’.

“I wonder if the man who told you about me is from the dark guild in the north.”

“Oh, he is. He said that you’re a soft-hearted person, so if you hear that Shelley-san is in danger, then you would certainly appear, even if you’re unsure. If Shelley-san had been kidnapped, then I would have killed two birds with one stone, but I’m not disappointed since it wasn’t a sure thing. I just gave a gold coin to some hoodlums, and it would be disappointing to let go of a child who is so emotionally attached to me.”

“You didn’t rebuke the girl who became emotionally attached to you for her sake, did you?”

“She’s cute, but she’ll keep on talking if you don’t stop her. There are times when she’s annoying too. I thought I could use her peculiar powers, so I told people she resembled my late wife... and everyone immediately accepted it. It’s my natural virtue.”

Earl Zakharov kept the same smile on his face since the beginning and wasn’t timid at all.

(I see. Ghost didn’t lie to me, but he held his real motive.)

I didn’t trust him, but I never suspected that was his motive.

(He also meant this when he said he wanted to have fun.)

If so, then I’m angry, but I also understand him.

Shelley-san coming to the north might indeed be trouble for Ghost, but he was looking forward to seeing me protect her.

“When you lost your ships, did you not think about buying some more?”

“You don’t know how it feels to lose a large amount of money you’ve saved in an instant, do you? People looked at me with pity. They pitied me. I couldn’t stand it. That’s why I couldn’t stop acting as I had before, even if I gave up on ships. I thought it would be fine if I found another method of income... That was a miscalculation.”

“You chose the wrong choices because of a worthless reason. That’s not a miscalculation; you lost rationality.”

However, Cordelia’s words didn’t reach Earl Zakharov.

“This herb isn’t being circulated in this kingdom yet. If people aren’t on their guard, then I won’t have any rivals.”

“Don’t you think that’s against ethics?”

“Selling it to customers who want it and making them happy. Spend the money I earn on charity and gain more praise. I don’t think it’s something to worry about since no one’s losing anything.”

Earl Zakharov got more and more excited by his words.

“The man in the north said this; Cordelia-san probably needs money, so why don’t you tempt her? I heard that you were different from Earl Pameradia and your brothers and that you were a tomboy and weren’t restrained by existing things.”

“...”

“You are Earl Pameradia’s daughter. You’re probably also good at stimulating plant growth. You know how wonderful these gold producing plants are, don’t you? Of course, some people may dislike this once it’s made public, but it’s not a prohibited item, so it shouldn’t be criticized. Some people might also try to make money in the same way once they know about it, so we can’t let them know.”

Apparently, another person has been attracted by Ghost’s cajolery.

(No, that’s not right. Earl Zakharov jumped into this mud boat himself.)

Cordelia wiped away the stern expression on her face and smiled again.

Then, she slowly raised her palm at the plant, and the plant withered in an instant.

“What?!”

“I like doing things that make me happy. However, I can’t agree with your ideology at all. Earl, no, Zakharov; you’re disgusting.”

Zakharov didn’t seem to understand what was going on, but Cordelia continued.

“Buying commendation with money? That’s wrong. There are certainly things you can’t buy and do without money, but the thing you have acquired is scorn. You might think you wouldn’t be caught, but I have no reason to overlook this.”

The smile she had put on her face, once again turned sharp.

At the end of Cordelia’s glare, Zakharov slowly raised his face from the potted plant.

However, the smile that had been lost in his face was back in an instant.

“This is quite different from what that man said. I heard that you would think more positively about this. ——— But, in any case, I’ll have you help me with this.”

“Do you think I would help you after everything I’ve said?”

“If you have to, then it’ll be a different story. You’re smart, so you’re also a little proud.”

Zakharov said as he slowly stood up.

“I have powers that aren’t inferior to a magician’s. I might be inferior to your father and brothers, but I even know martial arts. If I carry you to a carriage and take you out of the royal capital, then you’ll have to help me.”

“Ronnie will think something’s off if I disappear from this mansion. And, Otou-sama knows that I’m here.”

“Just like with Shelley-san, it’ll be fine if I tell them that suspicious people attacked the mansion. In fact, I could have kidnapped you at that time if you had told Ronnie to chase them by himself, but you were more cautious then, unlike now. Well, I know you’re on your guard because you confronted me while leaving your tail.”

“So that’s how it was. I don’t agree with how you think, but I understand it.”

He was recklessly indirect, but things didn’t go as he had planned. However, he still thought that he was in an advantageous position, and was relaxed.

However, Cordelia wasn’t panicking either.

“Then, I’ll tell you. I’m Earl Pameradia’s daughter. You said that I was cautious before, but didn’t you think that I might have thought this was a trap?”

Cordelia spoke as she quickly scattered some seeds.

“I’ve also heard that this is your special attack!”

Zakharov swung his sword down sideways and mowed down the plants which Cordelia had rapidly grew, but the plants quickly grew back to the same height as it was, and attacked Zakharov like they had a mind of their own. However, Zakharov’s sword was embedded with magic, and he didn’t yield.

(I don’t plan on losing in a magic endurance test, but it’s not a contest right now.)

Cordelia smiled, and in the next moment, a thick ivy vine wrapped itself around Zakharov’s neck from behind.

“I’ve been told to learn self-defence.”

“Gah!”

“If your carotid artery is tightened, then you’ll lose your consciousness... but before that, your neck will feel tight, and you’ll find it painful to breathe. You weren’t paying attention to your back, so I took it to my advantage.”

Cordelia spoke as she used another vine to fling the sword out of Zakharov’s hand. Then, at the same time, she strengthened the binding on his hands and feet. Zakharov’s expression distorted even more, but Cordelia was surprised.

(It went better than I thought.)

I thought it would be enough if I just stalled him a little, but I’ve trained my magic more than I imagined. But he was probably careless due to how Shelley-san usually acts. If his standards for ‘children’ is Shelley-san, he wouldn’t feel nervous even if he thinks I’m somewhat smart. In that case, I’ll have to thank Shelley-san a little.

“Wh... at... the... hell...!”

Zakharov said that his magic power was equivalent to that of a magician’s, and broke through the bondage on the left half of his body with his own magic. However, Cordelia didn’t panic.

She had already bought enough time.

“Zakharov, you’ve missed one more thing.”

“What...”

“Ronnie. He’s more reliable than you think.”

The moment Cordelia said that, the door was destroyed violently.

“See, isn’t he really reliable?”

“Argh... Ojou-sama, I told you to give me a signal if something happened, but I didn’t tell you to suddenly start a fight. What magic did you use?”

Zakharov widened his eyes in surprise, and Ronnie sighed as he scratched his head.

“Anyway, I’ll hear it later. I understand that you couldn’t settle things quietly, since it has become like this.”

Thus, Zakharov, who claimed to have the same power as a magician, quickly lost consciousness, because he wasn’t able to resist a real magician, especially since he was already restrained.

Later, Lara, who was waiting nearby, sent a message to the knights, and Zakharov was handed over to them while he was still unconscious. The knights searched the mansion and interviewed the servants, since Zakharov was manufacturing narcotics, but the servants had thought it was a decorative plant.



The day after Zakharov was arrested, Cordelia was talking to Isma and another knight at the castle again. She had already briefly explained the situation the day before, but she was called again today because she had entered the Zakharov mansion.

They told her that they would visit the mansion if she couldn't go out because of the shock she had received, but she wanted to visit the Big Bookcase, so she went to the castle, since she didn't want to waste time.

"I've also examined the plant, but it's just normal grass unless you dry the leaves and use it. He wanted to keep his money-making tree a secret."

Isma said, and Cordelia tilted her head a little.

"He was so careful about that, but he looked down on me."

"He might have been financially cornered. It seems like this was his last chance."

Cordelia indeed agreed with that.

Then, they talked for a while, and the other knight stood up from his chair.

"Let's stop here. I'll go get some drinks."

After seeing the knight off, Isma slowly got up. He had loosened up a bit.

"After he was arrested, he said in the interview 'I was threatened by a noble in the north to kidnap the girl, so I approached her to protect her because I thought she would be in danger. That noble pushed the narcotic plants onto me as advanced payment, so I didn't have them because I wanted them'."

Cordelia was surprised when she had heard that because Zakharov wasn't in any position to say that.

"Then, he didn't need to kidnap me to raise those narcotic plants."

"Yeah. He shut his mouth once we pointed that out. But he only kept silent until father got there."

"Otou-sama went to see him?"

"I don't know who called him, but when he felt father's wrath, he quivered and confessed a lot of things. He said that he went to look for that noble in the north in search of narcotics and that noble asked him to kidnap the Dreamer Girl. But he also said he refused since it was impossible to kidnap the girl while avoiding the knights. There are still some inconsistencies, but he couldn't stand father's pressure and fainted, so we'll be interviewing him again tomorrow. He's of no importance compared to the things he did."

Isma's expression as he said that stated, 'he deserved it'.

"Catching that beast is a big deal. I think you'll catch more attention in the castle than ever before, but don't worry about it too much."

"Thank you very much."

Cordelia smiled wryly at what Isma had said.

Cordelia's name spread to more people in the castle than ever before because of the incident.

A small group already knew about her because she had won the competition show, and the noble ladies knew about her through Vernoux's mother and her aunt, Countess Nirupama Weltoria, but that was only a small group of nobles. But rumours about Cordelia had quickly spread because she had just thwarted an Earl's conspiracy. The rumours were a bit exaggerated, and some people even said that she was following her brother and father, and belonged to the military faction, but they have never said anything to her directly, so she hasn't been able to correct them.

However, no one would complain if she behaved appropriately, even if she was in the military faction.

She understood that fame could become one's power, and the importance of boasting about one's name and pride. Of course, her ultimate goal wasn't to chase after only that and cling to one's reputation like Zakharov did.

『There are a lot of people who take action for justice and falsehood, and show off their vanity.』

『If you don't have something you can truly be proud of, the pride you hold is only for show.』

She still remembered the words Elvis told her when she was young.

At the same time, she hadn't forgotten 『If you don't have power, then people will make light of you』 .

(Even I want to bring as many smiles as I can to people's faces.)

Of course, I want to work more and more on the things that interest me, and I want to make aromas my weapon. But those things would be impossible if I can't imagine making someone happy. I want to raise my reputation because of my actions, but I will think about what methods to use to build my fame.

(But... Zakharov didn't say that he had a connection to Ghost.)

Did Ghost threaten Zakharov that badly that Zakharov didn't even mention Ghost, even though he fainted? Zakharov may mention him in the future, but at least he's gotten away with it for now.

(I can say that I was able to stop Shelley-san's kidnapping this time because of Ghost's ruse...)

Ghost really isn't on the side of justice. I can't let him get away with taking delight in people's reactions towards crimes.

I'll definitely catch him the next time he appears, Cordelia swore firmly.

As Cordelia thought those things, Isma gave a small sigh, then looked at her.

“They formally proved that she is Earl Clydereine's daughter this morning.”

“I'm surprised that they got the results so fast. So, she is his daughter.”

Cordelia was going to stop by the church to check up on Shelley on her way home, but she was confused since she didn't know what expression she should make now that Shelley's identity had been confirmed.

"I heard that he will be conducting the formalities to welcome her new home today. Still, she really is an energetic young lady, like you said she was. I think it'll be hard for her to adjust to our world."

"Yes, I think so too."

Cordelia probably didn't have to worry anymore, since Shelley was now under the protection of Earl Clydereine. On the one hand, she was glad, but on the other, she felt complicated.

(I had no choice, but I ended up being the one who introduced the heroine to the world of nobles.)

If she continues to act the way she does, then I can predict that she'll be disliked by those around her. At least, she'll definitely clash with Vernoux-sama and Clive-sama.

(Well, this is as far as I go. After this, it's best that we live our lives without getting involved with each other.)

I know her name, but we didn't introduce ourselves to each other, and she didn't ask for my name. I'm probably someone not worth worrying about to her.

I hope it'll stay this way forever.

"Oh yeah, Cordelia. Can you buy some sweets on the way home for father?"

"For Otou-sama?"

Cordelia tilted her head at Isma's sudden request, and Isma smiled and put his index finger on his mouth.

"This is a secret. Father knew that something could have gone wrong if things weren't handled properly, but he was worried since you had to battle."

"It's not that big of a deal."

"You may think so, but father was quiet and depressed. So, if you cheer him up... no, isn't it fine for you to depend on him?"

Isma was half-joking, but Cordelia frowned.

"Do I look that unreliable to Otou-sama?"

"He wouldn't have let you handle this if you weren't. However, trust and worry are two different things."

He couldn't express it clearly with words, but Cordelia could understand the word 'worry' a little. *However, I wonder if Otou-sama will really be distracted just by me depending on him, but since Isma-oniisama said this, should I try to ask for something?*

(But what on earth should I ask for? I hope I ask for something that would make Otou-sama happy too...)

Cordelia looked at the knight who had just returned with the maid who was pushing the cart as she thought, *I'll lightly mention it at dinner tonight*. Then, the conversation changed to trifling topics.

The maid who was serving tea smiled at Cordelia.

Cordelia responded while taking care not to smile awkwardly.

◆◆◆◆◆

After drinking tea, Isma walked Cordelia to the Big Bookcase, where Ronnie was waiting for her. She had already gotten a bit used to walking around the castle, but it was difficult for her to relax because she could encounter someone unexpected.

Cordelia walked to the Big Bookcase while asking Isma what sweets she should get, when she heard an unexpected voice.

“What a coincidence to meet you at a place like this, Isma-dono.”

Turning back at the voice, she saw a man, along a girl who she had gotten accustomed to seeing in the past few days, Shelley. Isma bowed lightly at Earl Clydereine.

“Hello, Earl Clydereine. You’ve finished with the formalities?”

“Yes, it’s troublesome to be indebted to the Pameradia House, but I’m grateful to you. Hey, Shelley, say hello.”

But, Shelley stared silently at Isma, even though Earl Clydereine had prompted her to greet them.

She should be used to seeing knights at the church, so why is she acting like that? Cordelia thought, and Shelley smiled widely.

“You’re a knight in this castle, right? Do you know the Prince? I want to meet him as quickly as I can!”

“Shelley.”

Shelley was reprimanded by the Earl, but she continued to behave as she usually did, and tilted her head as if she didn’t know why he had done so.

Cordelia’s face twitched involuntarily.

She hasn’t changed at all since she’s just been taken in by him, and hasn’t received any education. However, formalities aside, greetings are themselves a form of courtesy for humans, and don’t just apply to nobles. She guessed that Earl Clydereine must have been feeling awkward and felt sorry for him.

However, Isma didn’t even seem surprised at Shelley’s sudden question and looked at Earl Clydereine in a friendly way.

“It must be different from the life she’s used to.”

Isma said, and Earl Clydereine coughed.

“W-well it’s important that she gets used to it. But if this child is allowed to have an audience with His Highness in the future, then he might fall in love with her at first sight. She’s adorable and has a mysterious power. If that happens, then I feel sorry for Earl Pameradia.”

“You don’t have to. I’m sure my father would be happy as a retainer no matter who His Highness chooses. However, he would surely get lonely if this child becomes a bride, so he might want His Highness to choose someone else as his queen. Cordelia, your greetings.”

Prompted by Isma, Cordelia curtsied lightly at Earl Clydereine while smiling.

“I am the fourth child of Elvis Pameradia, Cordelia Enna Pameradia. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Earl Clydereine’s face distorted slightly because he had compared Cordelia’s greeting to Shelley’s. But Shelley spoke before the Earl could reply.

“You——.”

“It’s been a while, Shelley-san.”

“Why are you——? I definitely won’t lose!!”

“... Huh?”

Cordelia tilted her head at the sudden declaration.

For a second, she thought it was because of her greeting, but judging from Shelley’s threatening attitude, that didn’t seem to be the case. Isma and Earl Clydereine looked at Shelley in surprise, but she didn’t notice their gazes and revealed her hostility towards Cordelia.

“I know because I saw it in my dreams! You’re willing to do anything just so His Highness would look at you, right? Don’t you feel ashamed chasing after His Highness for so long?”

Cordelia widened her eyes at Shelley’s sudden remarks.



It was difficult for Cordelia to understand what Shelley had said since reality was different, but Shelley hadn't recognised her as important before.

"Shelley-san, what do you mean?"

"Don't act like we're friends!"

"I'm sorry, but I've rarely met with His Highness. I've met the young ladies who come to the Queen's tea parties more times than I've met him."

Cordelia had only started visiting the castle, and it was easy to tell that Shelley's statement was wrong. At least, Earl Clydereine should know that what Shelley had stated was different from fact. Still, she would be troubled if someone misunderstood because they had heard that and spread rumours about her, so she firmly denied Shelley's accusations.

However, Shelley didn't stop.

"You're lying. You'll definitely get in my way! Even now, you're desperately trying to get into His Highness's good graces, aren't you?! If you have free time, then you go to see His Highness, even though you're bothering him!"

"Even if you say I go to see him... As I said earlier, I've only met His Highness twice. The first time was by chance, and he summoned me the second time, so we haven't met in private."

"But, you appeared in my dreams...!"

Cordelia clicked her tongue inside of her mind at the word 'dreams'.

(It's useless. She doesn't listen to anything that relates to her dreams.)

But weren't her dreams infallible? It would be acceptable if she was talking about the future, but I don't go to see Sylvester-sama right now. Her dreams have already made a mistake.

"Even though you saw it in a dream, it's not very pleasant to be falsely accused," Isma said, and Earl Clydereine looked slightly bitter.

"She's been busy the past few days, so she might have been imagining things because she's tired. Shelley, we're going home."

"But Otou-sama!"

"That's enough, we're leaving. Excuse us."

After the two of them were out of sight, Isma sighed and shrugged.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, I was just a little surprised."

Yes, I was just surprised at first.

But she couldn't laugh and lie when she remembered Shelley's words, since the Cordelia who Shelley was talking about was like the in-game 『Cordelia』.

(What does this mean?)

It's impossible to ask Shelley about it.

If so, the only hint that comes to mind is the story of the first Saint that Clarice-sama was talking about in the Big Bookcase; the diary of the evangelist. Their diary might not mention anything, but that's the only clue I can come up with now.

“Can you keep this a secret from father? It'll probably become a hassle if he finds out.”

“Okay. Earl Clydereine also looked like he knew that what she said wasn't true, so I don't have to worry about it spreading straight away.”

“Yeah. Earl Clydereine knows that you don't visit His Highness... or rather, he should know that you're not a queen candidate anymore, so he should know better than anyone that you don't go to see His Highness. That girl says strange things.”

Even though Isma had said that, Cordelia felt that he was a bit irritated. His voice was calm, but it was also sharp. However, she couldn't think of anything to say to him, and only wanted to get to the Big Bookcase as quickly as possible.

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Cordelia met with Ronnie at once after she separated from Isma at the Big Bookcase, then she headed to the corner where the books on the Saint were gathered alone. The story about the Saint was popular as plays and wasn't just a part of history, so there were more scripts than actual facts.

Among those scripts, the book that Cordelia was looking for had a plain binding and was stuffed in the bookshelf.

“Found it.”

Cordelia pulled out the book that only had 『Evangelist』 written on the cover, and turned the pages on the spot.

Now that she had the book in her hand, she felt like it was a waste to move to a chair.

『This is a record written for me. So, I'll write in it diligently.』

The diary, which began with an informal sentence, seemed to be a copy of the Evangelist's diary.

The sinister end of the Saint that Ghost talked about, and Shelley, the girl rumoured to be the second coming of the Saint, and her misguided dream. Even if Shelley didn't have as much power as the Saint, Cordelia might be able to find a hint to that power in this diary.

The diary, which was written in the ancient language, was a little hard to read, but she could still read it.

The diary began with when the Evangelist's met the First King. If what they wrote was true, then the Evangelist teased the First King a lot. It seemed relatively disrespectful.

Aside from that, a woman who seemed like the 『Saint』 suddenly appeared in the Evangelist's diary. There were no specific descriptions, but one day, the word 『Mysterious Woman』 suddenly appeared more frequently in the journal. After that, the word 『Mysterious Woman』 eventually changed to 『Dreamer』 and 『Saint』.

They wrote their impressions on the 『Saint』 such as she dreamt that a calamity fell on the First King in her dreams, so she took countermeasures and become one of the founders of this kingdom; this was also written about in history books. As for the personality of the Saint, they wrote that she was a calm woman who put others before herself, and didn't seem human. This could be interpreted as them respecting the Saint and worrying for her as a comrade. Cordelia could tell that they were good comrades. They also wrote a lot of personal things such as what they ate for the day, and what they did in town.

However, the second half of the diary was dark.

Cordelia thought that the Evangelist wasn't going to write about the Saint for a while, but the next time they did, the content was completely different from the previous entries.

『It might be better if the Saint doesn't mention her dreams anymore.』

After that short sentence, entries about the Saint stopped again.

Then, the Saint was mentioned again a month later.

That entry was written in a language older than the ancient language. Cordelia needed a dictionary to decipher the entry, so she carried a dictionary and the diary with her to a nearby table. The translations weren't accurate, but she roughly understood what the Evangelist had written.

(I wonder if they wrote it in an older language than what was used back then because they didn't want others to read it.)

And, as if to support her guess, the words the Evangelist wrote out weren't positive.

『Recently, the Saint has only been making predictions about herself. I'm not going to say my opinions, no matter how she uses her powers. Rather, I think it's strange that she hasn't used her powers for herself until now. However, it sounds as if she's purposely trying to trick people, since her predictions sound too erratic and inconsistent.』

Is this the beginning of 『The ominous end of the Saint』 that Ghost was talking about?

Cordelia felt nervous as she continued reading while being careful not to mistranslate anything.

After that, the Evangelist wrote in the same characters again after several days.

『At first she had said that her power was for making 'people' happy. But did she include herself in 'people'? 』

『Of course, they may not be impossible futures. However, those broken logic predictions also seem like she's escaping, since she can't accept the reality. 'I saw a future I didn't want to see, so I want to pick at the seeds of anxiety,' she says as she closes her eyes to reality.』

『The people that she has saved still only think of her as the Saint. However, the sounds of friction have started.』

『She made a lot of people happy. Therefore, she should let go of her power and be happy.』

『Her treatment has been decided. They will tell people that she is resting because of a disease.』

Cordelia didn't know what the Saint's dream was nor what she had wanted because the Evangelist hadn't written this down. However, 『what the Saint wanted』 wasn't important to Cordelia.

The important thing was: that the Saint hadn't seen a dream about what she wanted, that there were people who suffered inconveniences because of her predictions, and the situation became so complicated that it was hard for her comrades to protect her. But, the most important thing was ——.

(The predictions of the Saint can be wrong, and others noticed this.)

There was someone who realised that her predictions were wrong, and put an end to it. Otherwise, she wouldn't have had to retire.

That was an important fact for Cordelia. For example, it wouldn't be a problem if a lot of people believed Cordelia, even if Shelley told an unlikely story like before. *I want to believe that there are accomplished people who can also interact with the Saint and that it's possible for me to get through to her.*

(I thought it would work out if I avoided the Prince and Shelley, but, at this rate, Shelley will probably try to involve herself with me.)

I don't want to have a bad reputation with those who believe in her power.

I can easily prove something like I don't meet up with the Prince, but I can't predict what she would say.

“If she says something that is hard to prove, then trust is the only thing I can rely on. I need to gain people's trust if I want them to help me.”

I know that she can't show definite evidence, but things can get worse.

It's highly likely that the dreams of the Saint and the dreams of Shelley are of the same nature, even if there's a difference in how strong their powers are.

(When Shelley was at the church, she respected and adored His Highness, but she wanted to be of use to him. But, by becoming the daughter of an Earl, it indicated that she had the possibility of becoming queen, even as a joke. If it's her, who believes her dreams are absolutely righteous...)

Earl Clydereine had already said that she could be queen.

Even if I regret this, I had no other choice at that time. Shelley also could have been welcomed into the Clydereine House eventually, even if I hadn't interfered. She thought that as she read the diary.

『The Saint has left. With this, the nation will remember her as a beautiful memory. The kingdom couldn't make her actions public because of her distinguished service. I also won't write any private opinions on official documents.』

Her specific actions weren't written down, but it was a lonely end for someone of distinguished service in the founding of the kingdom. Even though Cordelia had only seen glimpses of the unavoidable conflict, she could feel the Evangelist's regret from their writing.

(Come to think of it, the heroine in the game didn't use her power for herself, even at the end of the game.)

The heroine in the game had more power than the current Shelley and always used her dreams for someone else, just like the former Saint had. As a result, the heroine may have been influenced by her power, but, from the beginning, the heroine had never had dreams that decided her future.

This is just a hypothesis, but perhaps the power of dreams is inaccurate when one 'dreams of oneself'. If so, then it would explain why Shelley's dreams were off.

"I'm sure I wouldn't be able to behave in such a devoted way," Cordelia said. Then, she stood up so that she could return the dictionary and diary.

A lot of time had probably passed since I was reading something I wasn't used to. My eyes are a little tired. It happened when she returned the book and thought, *should I stand on my tiptoes?*

"What can't you behave like?"

"Eh?! Ah, oh my, Clive-sama. Are you looking for His Highness and Vernoux-sama today as well?"

Cordelia hadn't heard any footsteps at all because she wasn't concentrating. She panicked when Clive appeared and quickly forced a smile on her face.

Clive spoke to her, and he had a complicated expression on his face like always.

"His Highness has a sword lesson right now with your father."

"Huh? Father is teaching His Highness?"

She had let out a funny voice because it was the first time she had heard of that, and Clive looked at her suspiciously. She hadn't heard about that from anyone.

(I don't know how that happened, but it's not like Otou-sama volunteered to be His Highness's instructor so that he can get close to him, right?)

Otou-sama is just one of the many tutors that His Highness has, so I don't think I need to be told, but I'm a bit worried about why Vernoux-sama didn't mention it. Should I ask him about it next time?

"Well, whatever. But you're in a very different corner today. What book is that?"

"It's a book related to the legend of the Saint."

“Oh, a lot of women like that kind of setting. Do you also long to be like her?”

“I don’t need that power. It doesn’t suit my personality.”

I don’t have the confidence to say that I will use that power for others, like the Saint had. I don’t want that power nor its predictions, but I might give in to temptation if I have an alluring power. If so, then it’s better not to have a power like that.

“Surprisingly, you’ve already gotten acquainted with Earl Clydereine’s daughter.”

“You know about that? However, she probably doesn’t even remember my name, even though we know each other.”

“It seems like she’s quite obsessed with His Highness.”

“You know a lot.”

Cordelia was a little surprised because she didn’t think that Clive would know that much.

“I saw the encounter between you and Earl Clydereine and his daughter. I wasn’t in a place where I could easily hear your voices, but I could hear half of your conversation. She was a vivacious girl.”

Which means Shelley’s voice was loud enough that other people who were near us heard her. I thought there was no one around us, but voices echo here more than I thought it would.

Cordelia shrugged. *If Clive-sama knows about this, then that saves me time.*

“According to her, I intrude upon His Highness whenever I’m free.”

“You don’t.”

His scowl said, ‘Are you telling me something I know on purpose?’

Is there something else he wants to know? Cordelia thought and immediately came up with something.

“Are you worried that Earl Clydereine’s daughter would hinder His Highness’s future?”

“...”

He confirmed her words with silence.

“Well, I understand that she looks harmful. Anyway, what did you think when she said that?”

“What did I think?”

It was an unexpected question. Cordelia thought that he would ask her about Shelley’s personality instead of what she thought.

“Mm. She probably misunderstood, since I’ve only met with His Highness twice.”

“I know that. That’s not what I’m asking you about. Weren’t you irritated?”

“I can’t say I wasn’t, but I’ll be troubled if it happens again.”

I can’t express the various feelings I have towards Shelley, and it’s hard to express the emotions that are clogging up my chest.

“... It’s fine if you don’t feel down.”

“Oh my, were you worried about me?”

Cordelia asked, since she was surprised by his words, but Clive stopped moving and coughed.

“It’s not like I’m worried about you or anything. However, if you’re subjected to slander without reason, then I just wondered if it was alright to overlook it as a person...”

The words that he had muttered gradually became difficult to hear, but she knew that he was complaining. Even so, the only thing she could say was...

“Thank you very much.”

“There’s no reason to thank me.”

“Then, I’ll just say thanks once. It might be a joke, but Earl Clydereine said that Otou-sama might be annoyed if his daughter were to become queen. He might wish for them to be together.”

Clive’s frowned deepened upon Cordelia’s words.

“... Are you going to support that?”

“I don’t know if he’s serious or not. And, I understand that Earl Clydereine thinks that Shelley-san’s behaviour is not appropriate enough yet, so he probably won’t ask His Highness to meet with his daughter straight away.”

I don’t know how reliable it is, but the Shelley in the game studied to be a lady to a certain degree. And, judging from how Earl Clydereine was acting today, he wouldn’t let her out in public without educating her first.

“Well, she would at least need to learn the basics about how to behave and how to speak discreetly.”

Clive said harsh words like always, then he gave a long and irritated sigh.

“If I was with you today, then I could have said something, but I don’t have the chance to cut into quarrels between ladies. To begin with, if Vernoux-dono or I meditate, it might become inconvenient for you. You should dispel accusations like that yourself. Also, some think that Earl Zakharov’s matter was part of your scheme.”

“Thank you for your concern.”

For some reason or another, I can understand that having Clive-sama and Vernoux-sama’s support would cause inconveniences for me. If Sylvester-sama’s aides support me, then others would misunderstand it as the 『Prince’s intention』 even if it is by their own will, and I fear that His Highness would find it annoying.

And I also exposed Zakharov.

Most supported me when Zakharov was arrested, but some claimed that I had deceived him, so he is the victim. If I’m included in those who want to get close to the Prince, in this situation, then it would

look like I'm a nasty lady who tries to ensnare men with my social status, and the Prince, Vernoux-sama and Clive-sama are just giving in.

I know only a few think this, but still, those people probably don't need 'proof'. Even I know that.

"Clive-sama, can I ask you a question?"

"What is it?"

"I appreciate your advice, but you don't like me very much, do you? So, why are you worried about me?"

Judging by how he acted towards me when we first met, I would rather believe that he thinks I want to ensnare the Prince.

However, Clive distorted his face at Cordelia's question.

"I'm not showing you kindness. However, I don't know how I feel about that lady's false accusation."

"Really?"

"And, I will need information if she really wants to get close to His Highness. So... it's a process of elimination, since it seems like I can communicate with you better."

"Oh my... Thank you, for that?"

His tone was as thorny as ever, but he trusted Cordelia a little.

"Then, I have a proposal if we're going to be sharing information."

"Proposal? What kind of compensation do you want?"

Cordelia smiled and asked Clive who scowled for a second.

"Won't you call me, Cordelia? It's friendlier that way if we're going to be sharing information."

"... I can't believe I'm hearing the same thing His Highness said from your mouth."

"Did you say something?"

"No. I didn't say anything, Cordelia-jou."

She felt like he had complained, but widened her eyes since he had surprisingly accepted this request readily. She said it herself, but she thought he would be a little reluctant to call her by her name, since he had shown her hostility earlier.

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing."

But that's a delightful miscalculation, Cordelia laughed a little.

Act 52: A New Journey

Translator: Blushy

Editor: SenjiQ

An unexpected person greeted Cordelia when she came home from the castle.

“I heard about it, Cordelia! You’ve had a dreadful experience!!”

Cordelia’s aunt, Nirupama, hugged her before she could ever say hello.

“Ni-Nirupama-obasama...”

“Oh my, you’ve gotten more beautiful. I’m happy you’ve grown into a niece whom I can boast about. But, good job with that annoying matter.”

“Th-thank you very much.”

Nirupama spoke in a clear voice, as always, and Cordelia could tell that she was healthy, even if she didn’t ask. Nirupama nodded in satisfaction at Cordelia’s reply, then pondered.

“However, I can’t believe you got involved in something like that... I’m happy that you saved a girl, but I’m worried about you as an aunt. I wish I had come to pick you up sooner. But I can’t take you with me until Cyrus’s wedding ends, so it wouldn’t have made a difference.”

“Huh? Pick up... you say?”

What is she talking about? I didn’t hear anything about going out... She thought, and Nirupama’s eyes sparkled.

“You didn’t hear anything from Elvis-sama?”

“Hmm, did Otou-sama have something to tell me?”

“Hmm, I can tell you about it if you haven’t heard about it from him... Say, Cordelia. Why don’t you train to be a lady in my fief until you reach adulthood?”

Cordelia widened her eyes in surprise at the sudden offer.

The details would be explained after Elvis came home, so the conversation was left as it was until dinner.

Then, as soon as Elvis came home and started eating, Nirupama smiled widely and questioned the expressionless Elvis.

“Say, Elvis-sama. Why haven’t you told Cordelia about that yet?”

“It wasn’t important.”

“It’s already been three months. THREE MONTHS. It’s not like you didn’t have time to talk to her about this, right?”

Nirupama continued to smile as she said that in a rough tone, and Cordelia wanted to calm her down. However, she couldn't say anything because she thought she would be adding oil into the fire.

"Her sister was excellent, but she's had a hard time since she didn't have a model around her, right?"

"..."

"Or, do you also want Cordelia to face those same troubles?"

"..."

Nirupama was extremely angry, but she didn't show any sign of backing down.

"O-obasama. Otou-sama is also worried about me living in an unfamiliar place..."

"Oh my, he doesn't need to worry about that. Of course, you'll feel confused at first, but you're adaptable. And, you know she won't complain, don't you, Elvis-sama?"

"..."

"Fights between women, ——— Opps, I mean, the tactics women use are different from the ones men use. Unlike the royal capital, I can do what I want in the fief, and I can gain influence with the feudal lords' wives whenever I go to greet them. I think it would be useful for her if she wants to compete with essential oils, and you're bad at socialising, so I need to show her how to socialise, right?"

"..."

"E-l-v-i-s-sama, are you listening?"

"... I can hear you."

From his reaction, it seemed like he agreed with the idea.

"Cordelia, do what you want."

Elvis answered in a somewhat annoyed tone.



However, even if he said the decision was up to Cordelia, she still hadn't heard enough about it to make a decision.

"How long will I be there for?"

"I don't mind if you stay with me forever... Hey, Elvis-sama, don't glare at me like that. Well, I think it's better if you celebrate your adulthood here, so I guess until then?"

Sixteen was the age of adulthood in this world, so two years. That was longer than Cordelia had anticipated.

Nirupama continued since she had predicted that Cordelia would be confused.

"You have a lot of things to do, so it might be difficult for you to give me an answer straight away. However, if you think about it positively, I'm sure it'll be of use to you."

Nirupama was quite right.

What I learn from Otou-sama and the tutor are useful, but I still haven't seen a lady who would be my role model in the Pameradia House.

It's been two years since I've started sending flowers to Okaa-sama. She hasn't returned the flowers, but she doesn't speak to me either. I've heard that she asked for flowers when I was at the fief, but she hasn't asked me about them herself.

(I can understand why Onee-sama had a hard time when she first debuted in high society because she didn't have a model.)

It may be easy to practice what I have learnt so far, but knowledge is just preparation, and practice is different.

In that case, I've decided on my answer.

"Oba-sama, may I ask for your guidance?"

This is a once in a lifetime chance.

I also have the choice of staying in the royal capital for two years, worrying about Shelley. She might continue to use her dreamer power, but she won't appear in high society right away. In that case, I want to do what I can before her influence grows.

(I have more acquaintances than her while we're still children. People probably wouldn't believe things as they are when they're clearly different from the facts.)

I'm more worried about what will happen once we step into the world of adults. Even if a strange rumour circulates, I can dispel it with my actions. In the first place... I will probably need to gain abilities that don't require me to ensnare a person.

(Even so, I really don't want people to say that I'm a lady who is bothering the Prince.)

To be honest, I can't even imagine that love would bloom between Shelley and Sylvester-sama right now, so I don't think I can get jealous of their love, and have my magic run wild like the in-game 『Cordelia』.

However, I have to fall in love with Sylvester-sama first to get jealous, but he's the target of my fear, so I don't have to worry about it, from that perspective, since I won't fall in love with him.

(But I'll become a troublesome lady if I ignore Shelley's words and actions. If that happens, then I'll cause problems for my family... And, if rumours are going around about me being a relentless lady, then it might harm my future marriage!)

That's right... I still want to experience love.

At least, I want to do the things I couldn't in my previous life, in this life. I'll have more opportunities to meet the person of my dreams when I become an adult, but if Shelley keeps attacking me, then I might miss the chance. I'm not interested in her love life at all, so I hope that she doesn't approach me; but at present, she probably will.

(It's really different from what I expected, but... Shelley is a danger to me, after all.)

For now, the things she said could be taken as a joke, but if things heat up, then she might frame me and say that I'm trying to trick the Prince. We may have to settle this matter eventually, at this rate, but... I should hone my skills for that time.

However, I want to live as peacefully as I can.

Cordelia looked straight at Nirupama, who smiled wider.

"I'm the one who invited you, so of course. But I wonder if it's alright for you to make this decision now."

"I have to get ready, so I can go a month after Onii-sama's wedding."

"Alright. I'm looking forward to it. Cordelia, look forward to it too, okay?"

"I have to get your room ready too," Nirupama's tone changed from angry to happy.

"Elvis-sama, don't stay quiet. Don't you have encouraging words to say to her before she leaves?"

"... She's not leaving yet."

"Argh, you can keep saying it to her until she leaves, can't you?!"

Still, Nirupama didn't conceal her pleased tone.

Cordelia was grateful that she was so loved. She talked to Nirupama about the fief while eating, then Elvis suddenly opened his mouth.

"I have something to say too. Cyrus will retire from the Imperial Guards after his marriage, and will live in Ertiga for a while."

"Oh my, that's sudden... or maybe not. He wants to learn things from Zeke-sama, the acting feudal lord, doesn't he?"

It was also Nirupama's first time hearing that, but she didn't seem surprised like Cordelia. Cordelia hadn't known about this, but it must have been decided a long time ago.

"The deputy commander of the first unit will take over as commander of the second unit."

"Oh my, then the person who will take over as the deputy commander for the second unit is..."

"Yeah, it's Isma. There was also talk about him succeeding Cyrus, but they concluded that it was probably better for him to get used to commanding his own unit first."

Nirupama raised her voice in surprise when she heard that.

"Rumour has it... So that means Cyrus and you didn't support this decision?"

"I don't need to interfere with the army now. Cyrus also hadn't opposed or supported this decision. I recognise Isma's abilities, but I know that it would be troublesome for him if people think it's because of his lineage."

Were Isma-oniisama and Cyrus-oniisama talking about this matter in the corridor the other day?

In any case, big changes are happening in the Pameradia House.

"But, if Cyrus is gone, and Cordelia comes with me, then you'll be a little lonely."

"They'll be back straight away."

Elvis replied instantly, and Nirupama shrugged.

"It seems like things will be tough when Cordelia gets married."

"It's still too early."

"Or, you can let her come to me for a groom?"

"That's the same."

"Argh, you only reply quickly in times like this."

Elvis remained expressionless, but Nirupama seemed to be enjoying this.

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"So, I'll be going to Weltoria fief for a while since things have settled down."

A few days later, Cordelia briefly explained the situation to Vernoux, and he looked a little surprised as he drank his tea.

"That's sudden. Well, I guess it isn't, since the Earl knows about it... But I'll miss you."

"Oh my, are you unwilling to part with me?"

"Oh, I'm disappointed that I won't get to eat this Sachertorte for a while. So, I'm taking another slice."

She had thought it was rare for him to make a serious remark, but his real aim was the cake. *I might have to consider that all the things he says have a hidden meaning.*

“You don’t have to worry about the mobile library. I’ll assign the proper positions as long as I take over.”

“Thank you very much. It’s awkward for the person who proposed it to pull out.”

“Thanks to someone, it’s alright to leave people out, so it’s fine.”

“Thank you for your compliment.”

She replied as Vernoux was reaching for the second piece of cake, and he shrugged.

“Oh yeah, I heard that Miss Clydereine is hard to please.”

“Did you hear about her from Clive-sama?”

“It’s because it’s unusual for him to be annoyed at someone other than me.”

This time, Cordelia couldn’t help but shrug at what Vernoux had said.

“Please be kinder to him.”

“I’ll do my best. No, I am doing my best.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Well, I’ll contact you if that girl does something, it seems like they’re looking for an excellent tutor for her right now. On another topic, can you make some time before you leave?”

“Huh? Sure, I can.”

“Then, I’ll get Gille, and we’ll have a farewell party. Of course, you can bring Ronnie with you too.”

Cordelia was surprised by her friend’s encouragement and smiled.

“Thank you very much. I’ll be happy to have a farewell party with you two.”

The edges of Vernoux’s lips lifted up when he heard Cordelia’s reply.

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The Flantheim House’s carriage came for Cordelia when she had finished getting ready for her trip next month. Vernoux and Gille were inside the carriage.

Cordelia hadn’t asked about their destination because she was looking forward to seeing it on the day, but she guessed that they were probably going somewhere in town... But then she noticed that they were going out of the capital walls.

“Are we going to Oulu Village?”

“Well, just look forward to it.”

Judging from the way Vernoux had spoken, it didn’t seem like they were going to Oulu Village.

“I’ll give you a hint, Gille chose the location.”

“Oh my, Gille-sama did?”

She had taken Ronnie along, so Gille and Vernoux were sitting face-to-face, but Gille was quietly staring out the window today.

“Gille, calm down. The place won’t change, even if you worry.”

“I-it’s not like I’m worried or anything...”

“Honestly. Don’t complain when you get sick because of your tension.”

Gille stared out the window again without replying as Vernoux shrugged.

Gille had only said a few words today. Cordelia felt happy to be going to that place, since he had thought so much about it.

“I feel relieved to know that Gille-sama was the one who picked the place.”

“Dilly, that’s adding pressure.”

Rude.

However, Gille was still looking out the window, and Cordelia couldn’t ask him how he felt.

(But... if so, then I shouldn’t look out the window until we arrive.)

Gille-sama had chosen the location.

I’m sure it’s better not to see it until we get there. I’m sure it’ll be amazing.

Vernoux and Cordelia chatted as Gille stared out the window. The carriage finally stopped after some time had passed, and Vernoux and Gille got off first. After that, Cordelia slowly got out. It was a meadow filled with colourful flowers.

The meadow was gorgeous. There were light flowers and primary coloured flowers.

“Wow.”

The stem was about the length of her elbow to fingertip, and the flowers were multi-layered. She bent down in curiosity, and a light scent tickled her nostrils. Looking closely, there were also some baby’s-breath mixed in with the flowers.

“Do you like it?”

“Yes, it’s a very lovely view, Gille-sama.”

Cordelia could slightly hear the sound of running water, so there was probably a river nearby. It was a very peaceful place, and she could also hear birds chirp from time to time.

"I haven't heard you talk about this place before, so I thought you probably hadn't come here yet."

"Thank you very much."

"Gille, Dilly. Go take a walk. I'm going to take a break," Vernoux said, as he sat down in the shade of a tree. The breeze was quite pleasant, so it was probably a good place to take a nap.

"But why are you taking a break? We've just arrived. And, it's still before noon."

"I didn't get enough sleep. Ah, but you don't have to worry about me and just go where I can see you."

I don't think it matters if you can see us since you're sleeping, but I guess he meant to say that he wasn't interested so we can go wherever we want.

"Then, Gille-sama, would you like to take a walk?"

"Of course."

"Thank you very much. Ronnie..."

"I'll stay here. I can't sense any monsters, but please stay where I can see you."

It will probably be difficult for Ronnie to join in on the conversation, even if he comes with us. It's not a bad idea to let him rest here for a while.

"This is nice. The shade over here is pretty good."

(No, Vernoux-sama. Ronnie won't feel at ease if he's next to you.)

There are other trees aren't there, he doesn't have to share with you, but it's hard for Ronnie to refuse anyway. I think I should return as quickly as possible for Ronnie, but I also want to enjoy the scenery until I'm satisfied.

(Ronnie, I'm sorry. Just wait for a bit, alright?)

Even Ronnie would let me be this selfish.

Cordelia walked around the meadow with Gille and noticed a single flower.

"What is this flower called?"

"It's called Lug. They're great charms for both studying and martial arts. By the way, it grants divine protection for both wisdom and martial arts, and there was a time when it was used as a charm to protect travellers."

"So, that's why you took me here...?"

She tilted her head, and Gille laughed shyly.

"I heard this from my mother. She often makes pressed flowers from this, but it's difficult to grow them, even if you transplant it, because of the magic in the soil. So, I thought you probably hadn't seen them before either."

“Thank you very much.”

Gille-sama definitely picked this place.

She thought again.

“I understand your mother’s feelings, since this flower is so cute. It would be nicer if you could transplant this flower.”

“Hmm. But I don’t think mother really wants to transplant it either. If she succeeds, then she wouldn’t have a reason to come here anymore.”

“This is definitely a great place. I’d like to come back here again.”

It’s a really calm place, and it makes me want to stretch.

I think it’ll look beautiful in a garden as well, but people probably think it’s beautiful because it blooms here.

“Then, I won’t say it here.”

“Say what?”

Cordelia tilted her head a little, since it was rare for him to be even a little mean, and Gille laughed.

“Tell me when you come back to the royal capital. I’ll bring you here again.”

Cordelia widened her eyes and laughed a little.

“Aren’t you a little surprising?”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t apologise. Then please bring me here again when I return.”

“It’s a promise. I feel a bit sad since I won’t be able to see you for a while.”

Cordelia’s reaction was a little delayed since his words were a bit different from what Vernoux had said the other day. She knew that he was sincere, but she couldn’t find the words to answer right away. She was happy that she was valued as a friend, but she felt embarrassed to accept those words.

However, it would remain silent if she didn’t reply.

“I’ll become a splendid lady by the time I return. So, please be surprised.”

“I think you’re already a wonderful lady, but if you’re that enthusiastic, then I’ll do my best so I won’t lose either. I heard that the climate there is a bit different from the royal capital, so take care of yourself.”

“Yes, you too, Gille-sama... What’s wrong?” Cordelia asked, since Gille looked like he wanted to say something.

Gille stayed silent for a while before shaking his head sideways.

“No, it’s nothing. The flowers here look pretty when they’re cut too, and it’s easy to dry them. I’ll pick some flowers that will suit you before we go back.”

“Okay, thank you very much. Then, you’ll have to start picking those flowers now.”

“You’re right. We still have a lot of time since I also brought us lunch. The ham sandwiches from the Flantheim House are very delicious.”

“Oh my, I’m looking forward to eating them.”

I’m sure he has something to say.

But I won’t force him to say it, if he doesn’t want to.

“Please take it easy. But I hope that you’ll fulfil your goal.”

“Thank you very much.”

I’m lucky to have friends who support me.

I’ll tackle everything that appears before me.

Cordelia smiled widely with determination.



Extra 01: Father and Daughter on a Day Off

Translator: Blushy

Editor: SenjiQ

Recently, Cordelia and the servants noticed that the mood in the mansion was much heavier at breakfast and, of course, that was because of Elvis's mood.

(This probably started after I decided to go to Oba-sama's fief...)

She had heard from Isma that Elvis had been restless during the Zakharov incident, but he didn't show that side of him to her. She didn't know if she could describe his behaviour as anxious right now, but it was overwhelming since the mood was so heavy.

(I gave him sweets, like Isma-oniisama had advised me to, after the Zakharov incident, but I don't think his mood would improve even if I give him sweets now.)

Isma-oniisama also proposed that I let Otou-sama spoil me, but I can't think of how to let him spoil me right now. And, I also want Otou-sama to feel happy from spoiling me, so I can't come up with a way to do this.

(Hmm, it's hard to ask him to go on a ride with me under this heavy aura. What else can I ask for...?)

Cordelia was troubled, then she suddenly remembered when she had headed to the castle with Elvis.

(Oh yeah... Otou-sama seemed to know a lot about the restaurants in town.)

She certainly remembered that he had said something like that when she went to the castle with him to get the permit.

(Alright, I've decided.)

He said I couldn't go there on my own, but he never said that he wouldn't take me.

I want to eat tasty food, and the lively aura might divert his attention. Most importantly, this request is just selfish enough so he can spoil me. Cordelia concluded and made up her mind.

"Otou-sama, I have a request."

"... What is it?"

"Won't you go on a date with me on your day off?"

She said it jokingly, but that one word made Elvis choke.

Their date, or rather, their outing would be decided on another day, and Elvis returned to his room as soon as he finished his meal. Afterwards, Hans called out to Cordelia with a smile.

"Ojou-sama, you're already at the age where you utter those words."

Of course, I'm sure I conveyed that the word 'date' was a joke to Otou-sama. After that, it seemed like he went back to his usual dignified behaviour, but I feel like he spoke less than usual.

However, 16-year-olds in this world were considered adults, so I'm nearly there at 14.

He might have been surprised, since I've never discussed love with him before, but I never expected him to have such an extreme reaction like that. He might have choked worse than he had when Obaa-sama talked about how he was like as a child, if I had worded things wrong.

(But I feel like Otou-sama has more emotion than he used to.)

It's hard to say that his facial expressions have become richer, but it's easier to read his mood now. That's why the servants interact with him more now.

While thinking that, Cordelia expressed her wish of wanting to go to a restaurant in town when Elvis called her to his study after dinner. Elvis thought for a while, but he agreed.

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A few days later.

Cordelia walked alongside Elvis for the first time in town.

Elvis looked rougher than usual, but the sharp glint in his eyes remained the same.

However, he didn't feel out of place.

"... A restaurant, right?"

"Yes."

"It's probably different from what you're imagining. Do you mind?"

"It's alright. I'm looking forward to it."

"The restaurant is really lively. Be prepared."

She could feel that from there, already.

"Otou-sama, when do you come...?"

"... But that's a word that doesn't fit this place."

"Excuse me?"

I was just asking him when he comes here, but what had I said wrong?

"That word is a bit too formal for a place like this."

In short, he was saying, 'The word 'Otou-sama' doesn't suit this place'.

In the past, Vernoux had warned Cordelia not to add the suffix 'sama' to people's names in town. It had been hard for her at that time, but changing the way she called Elvis was harder than dropping suffixes.

But, it's the same if I call him 'father'. Another way to call him would be...

“Papa...?”

“...”

No one said anything, and it became silent between them. Cordelia could only hear the lively voices of other people, and even their footsteps had disappeared.

“... Either way feels uncomfortable...”

That was the only thing he had said after they walked for a long while.

However, calling him ‘papa’ isn’t considered unnatural, since we’re in town. I can’t think of any other way to call him.

(Maybe Otou-sama isn’t used to hearing me call him ‘papa’...?)

She glanced at the side of his face and saw an expression she had never seen before.

(... Is he enduring something?)

I don’t know what impression I’m getting from him.

But Cordelia decided that it wasn’t unpleasant to call him that, since he hadn’t rejected it straight away.

When they got to the entrance of the restaurant, she heard people chattering inside.

It was a mix of cheerful and energetic voices and sometimes quarrels. A man, who seemed to be the owner, would shout when things got out of hand, but that didn’t quieten the noise. This was probably a regular scene at this restaurant.

“Feel free to sit on the empty seats around here~!”

As Cordelia looked around the restaurant, they were greeted roughly by a waiter. *The waiter is talking to Otou-sama, but it feels strange for an Earl to be spoken to in this way, even if the waiter doesn’t know that Otou-sama is an Earl.*

Of course, Otou-sama came here because he doesn’t care about that. As Cordelia thought that, Elvis took a seat in the corner, and he had already picked up the menu to decide on what he would order.

Cordelia quickly sat in front of him and looked at the menu that Elvis had offered her. The menu, which had food stains on it, included several kinds of grilled fish, beef, pork, chicken and lamb dishes, as well as salad and egg dishes. She turned the menu over and saw a lot of alcohol listed at the back.

(Alcohol...)

She really wanted to drink a cup with Elvis, but he would probably stop her since it was still too early to drink. However, there was a lot of alcohol listed, so she was curious about which ones tasted nice.

“... What’s wrong?”

“Otouto-sama. Won’t you drink alcohol with me when I become an adult? I want to drink something you recommend.”

“...”

Elvis froze for a while, then coughed.

“... You should decide what to order now.”

“Then, I should quickly make my decision.”

What kind of alcohol would he recommend?

I'm looking forward to seeing if he would recommend something he likes or something I would like. Otou-sama seems a little troubled, but he'll probably allow for this much selfishness, she convinced herself. That's right, it's okay.

But if I don't order like he says, then I won't be able to get him to make this promise.

However, Cordelia was troubled because all the items on the menu weren't served at the mansion. She became even more troubled since she didn't know when she would have the chance to come here again.

However, it's also troublesome to make Otou-sama wait for too long... The moment she thought that a dish being served to a customer suddenly appeared at the corner of her vision.

“Sorry for the wait~!”

The iron plate that was placed on the customer's table was piping hot with steam, and the sounds it made stimulated her appetite.

“Th-that's...!”

It was a hamburger, no matter how she looked at it.

However, their home didn't serve hamburgers on iron plates.

It looks like it's going to jump out... No, other than the sauce that's already flying out, it's served with sunny-side-up on top.

“Otou-sama! I want to eat that!”

Cordelia demanded, and all her hesitation flew out the window. The sight of Elvis ordering food here was valuable, but she was so excited to eat the hamburger that she didn't care.

She had eaten hamburgers many times at home.

However, hamburgers served with sunny-side-ups were a gem that she hadn't seen yet.

After waiting for a while, the hamburger that arrived looked sparkling to her. That was when she noticed that Elvis had ordered the same dish as she had.

She said her prayers, then cut the meat with her knife, and carried it to her mouth with a fork.

The sauce and meat were both hot and brought out the flavours in her mouth.

Then, she cut the sunny-side-up with her knife and admired as the thick yolk poured out onto the meat, and carried it to her mouth. The taste deeply impressed her and didn't betray her expectations.

“... Is it good?”

“Yes, of course!”

“You’ll get burnt if you eat it too fast.”

“Okay.”

She hadn’t meant to wolf it, but she must have been moved by her emotions.

She hadn’t eaten too fast, but she was happy from the aura in the restaurant and forgot her manners. She was so embarrassed.

“... You seem to like it a lot.”

“Yes, the place where the sunny-side-up was is delicious.”

Of course, the food at the mansion is delicious, and I love it, but it feels nostalgic to eat at this place, since it reminds me of my previous memories, and it feels warm to eat at a smaller table than the one at the mansion, so I’m happy.

“I see... Anyway, are your preparations going well?”

Elvis suddenly changed the topic while she was trembling with emotion as she ate, and she hesitated for a second. He was definitely talking about her preparations for Weltoria.

“Yes.”

The plans should be able to proceed without delays.

She conveyed that he didn’t need to worry, and Elvis nodded.

“I see.”

“Thank you for seeing me off. I’ll surprise you by becoming an amazing lady by the time I return.”

She said relaxingly while eating her favourite food, and Elvis replied with an unexpected answer.

“... I’m already plenty surprised.”

“Can I take that in a good way?”

“Have you ever let me down?”

Elvis’s tone was the same as ever and wasn’t very honest. However, his words were powerful enough to make her forget about her favourite food.

“I’m honoured to hear you say that. And, if you really think that way, then I’ll try to exceed your expectations.”

Cordelia looked at Elvis and said when she let go of her fork and knife.

“... If that’s what you want, then I’ll give priority to your intentions.”

“Thank you very much.”

“You don’t have to hold back when you want to discuss something with me. You can tell me ahead of time if there’s something that involves risk. I’ll do everything to help your path.”

Elvis said, then resumed with his meal. His hands which were moving the knife seemed lighter than before.

“I’m very grateful for your concern.”

I’ll probably still worry him in the future.

However, he’ll probably become less anxious if I accomplish more and more things.

“Then, I’ll like to ask you for a favour.”

“What is it?”

“I want to ask you to drink with me, but when I return from Oba-sama’s place, can you come out with me like this again?”

“... Alright.”

It took a while for him to reply, but those words made Cordelia smile wider.

Epilogue: A Little into the Future

Translator: Blushy

Editor: SenjiQ

[Sylvester P.O.V.]

“... Let’s stop here today.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Your Highness has gotten a lot stronger.”

Elvis has remained expressionless since we met, but he still gave me a rare compliment. I know that he won’t flatter me, so I was stunned and happy that he had complimented me. However, there was another feeling that gushed up from within me as well.

“I’m still not strong enough yet.”

Elvis praises me as much as he did when I was younger.

Compared to his sons, Cyrus and Isma, I still have a long way to go.

When I thought that, I heard a familiar laugh from behind me.

“Haha, you’re usually sincere, but you won’t accept your master’s compliments... Apparently, my son has finally reached his rebellious age.”

“Father.”

I was a little surprised that father was here since he usually didn’t come here.

“Sylvester, you should accept compliments. It’s good that you want to improve, but it’s rare for Elvis to compliment someone, so you’ll be punished if you don’t accept it.”

“Your Majesty.”

“Oh, did I say something wrong? But, I came here today because I heard that Elvis started praising Sylvester recently.”

“Huh...?”

“Oh, you didn’t hear it directly?”

I reflexively looked at Elvis when I heard that. Elvis had no expression on his face and remained calm. His attitude also stated that he hadn’t particularly said anything special about me.

I blinked, and father laughed.

“I still remember that day when you asked me if you can have a match with Elvis.”

“Father, now that’s...”

I haven't forgotten that I demanded this of father because Dilly liked knights. However, it felt uncomfortable to say that in front of Elvis. However, father doesn't know the real reason behind it anyway.

"Your Majesty, if you're going to enjoy each other's companies, then I'll step down."

"Oh, don't worry about it. I also came here to discuss something with you."

"With me?"

"Yeah. Why don't you accompany me for a while tonight? I got some good alcohol. Your beloved daughter is in Weltoria, so you don't have to rush home, right?"

Elvis frowned at father's words.

"I'm sorry, but..."

"Oh, my bad. I'm not teasing you. I just want to thank you in advance."

Father continued with a smile to the Earl, who was baffled.

"It's about time for me to choose a new sword for Sylvester. There are probably things that Sylvester and I can't understand if we went alone, so won't you come with us, Elvis?"

"His Highness's sword?"

"Eh, my sword?"

My voice and Elvis's almost overlapped. I don't remember asking my father for a sword, but Elvis accepted father's words with a nod.

"It might be a good time."

"Ah. He seems to like what he has now, but he's coming of age. I want to give him something good at this turning point in his life."

Of course, I know that I'm approaching adulthood.

But receiving a new sword for that... makes me feel like I've been recognised as an adult, and I became speechless. Father laughed at how I was acting.

"Let's choose a good sword that people will vow to. A sword that will allow you to overcome any difficulty...!"

"Th-thank you very much...!"

I still don't know what kind of sword I will receive. But I know that I was so pleased with this that I had trouble breathing.

◆◆◆◆◆

I returned to my room, and Vernoux was sitting on the edge of my desk.

“Hey, you look happy today.”

“Yup, something good happened.”

“Did you finally get a hit on the Earl?”

“... Not yet.”

I smiled wryly at my friend who had dragged my happy mood down.

“More importantly, Vernoux, that’s not a chair, it’s a desk. Clay will get angry when he gets here.”

“Oh, he’s not coming yet, so it’s fine. I can’t sit on your chair, and this chair is pretty high and easy to sit on.”

“But it’s not a chair.”

Vernoux stated his argument, and I gave up on persuading him... or rather, I don’t care since his sitting position doesn’t bother me. However, I warned him since he might make Clay angry again.

“But it’s not easy getting a hit on him.”

“Don’t say it so easily. Elvis is powerful.”

“Well, I know that. I definitely wouldn’t want to have a match with him.”

I don’t think he has to refuse it to that point, but his eyes are serious. Vernoux has always liked sword training, so he probably really wanted to avoid having a match with Elvis.

“Gille, what would you do if the Earl says, ‘I won’t give my daughter to a man who isn’t stronger than me’?”

“Before that, the problem is whether she would accept me or not... If he does say that, then I can only try my best.”

“Hmm? You’re really positive today, is it because of the ‘good thing’ that happened?”

“Yeah.”

I answered immediately, and Vernoux shrugged.

“Well, it’s great that you’re in a good mood. And something to make His Highness Sylvester happier.”

“A letter from Dilly came?”

“... So you know about it. Here.”

Vernoux threw the letter at me even though it was important, so I quickly caught it. Then, I swiftly took out the paper-knife from my drawer and opened the letter.

“What did she write?”

“Wait, I’m reading it now.”

Vernoux seemed to enjoy my reaction more than the contents of the letter, so I lightly brushed him off as I read the letter I hadn't received in a while. As expected, we send letters to each other less frequently than when Dilly lived in the royal capital, but even though a year has passed, we still send each other letters at a fixed interval.

"... It looks like Dilly's working hard on a lot of things. She went with Countess Weltoria to meet various feudal lords last month. She said she wants to help with trading, and the wives love her."

"Eh. Travelling, huh. Sounds like fun."

I briefly told him what I had read, and Vernoux raised his voice in envy, so I tilted my head.

"Does Dilly not tell you anything?"

"It's a miracle if she writes five lines in her letters to me."

"I see."

I was a little surprised since Dilly is an excellent writer and she had only written that much to Vernoux.

"She sends me different kinds of preserved food instead of a letter. She wrote, 'I think it's better for Vernoux-sama to receive products rather than a letter'."

Thinking about it carefully, I can't imagine Vernoux writing a proper reply to Dilly no matter what she writes. He finishes things he has to submit, but when they're private letters, he ends them in two sentences. Well, it's probably because it'll be quicker for him to meet the person than write them a letter.

To sum it up, Dilly replied appropriately since Vernoux doesn't write much in his letters. However, please forgive me for feeling like I talk to Dilly more because of this.

"Oh yeah, the dried shellfish that I received the other day was pretty good. I had it made into soup, and it tasted pretty good."

"Oh."

Maybe I'll get her to send me some next time, so I can try it. I read the second letter as I thought about that.

"... She's made a herb garden in Ertiga."

"Are the fields and greenhouse in the royal capital not enough for her?"

"It's probably not enough for making essential oils. She also started making a workshop. I wonder if she's going to make that a speciality product."

It's pretty widespread that Dilly is making fragrant essential oils.

However, she hasn't debuted in high society, and her guardian, Elvis, is pretty hard to approach. Even if people know that they can contact her through Countess Weltoria or Marquis Flantheim and his wife, they wouldn't expect to be referred for free.

Therefore, more women are looking forward to Dilly's appearance than she could imagine.

Rumour has it that people have tried to imitate Dilly and have been making new aromas, but they haven't succeeded, and the products that she has produced until now are still priceless treasures. I don't know if it's a perfect mistake, but Dilly is still a child, and she's clad in pleasant aromas, so incomplete products were forced to be recognised as failures.

I'm sure Dilly anticipated a situation like this when she announced her product back then. She's able to come up with things that I couldn't, one after the other, so it wouldn't be strange if she thought this could happen.

"Hmm..."

"What's wrong?"

"Well, thinking about it again, Dilly tries hard in a lot of things, right? So, I also want to write to her that I'm doing my best too, but it's disappointing that I can't come up with anything."

All the things I'm doing my best in are as 『Sylvester』. Honestly, the only thing that 『Gille』 is doing his best in is going incognito. I think it would seem insincere if I only write about going incognito, having said that, I can't write about the things I do as 『Sylvester』.

"『Actually I'm Sylvester』, you can write that, can't you?"

"You can say that lightly... but what is the probability of her not replying to me after I write that?"

I'm sure she'll stop replying to me. I thought, and Vernoux tilted his head.

"100%, she'll definitely reply."

"Huh?"

I widened my eyes in surprise since he didn't take long to reply. Did Dilly tell Vernoux something...? However, my expectations were shattered in an instant.

"Do you think Dilly is someone who could ignore a letter from 『His Highness』?"

Vernoux said in a very natural way, and I sighed with all my heart.

"... Which means she'll send back a really reserved letter?"

"Well, yeah."

"I can't have that. No."

That would hardly be a letter from Dilly. Vernoux sighed a few times at me.

"It's your fault for not saying it on that day. You finally took her out and created an opportunity to do so, but you didn't."

"... I missed the chance because it was too cosy."

"Good grief. You good-for-nothing."

It was a horrible thing to say, but unfortunately, I don't have a reply to him.

I was really going to tell her that day.

I wanted to tell her since we were going to be separated for a long time.

I don't know what kind of encounter is waiting for her at Weltoria fief, and there have been rumours that she will be adopted by Countess Weltoria from long ago, so I was really going to tell her that I'm Sylvester.

But, Dilly was pleased and was enjoying herself, so I hesitated to tell her something about myself. I wanted her to make happy memories, but it could have been ruined.

I was also worried that if I were to be rejected at that time, then I wouldn't be able to justify myself because of the distance between us. I don't know why she's been avoiding me since long ago, but I can still make a comeback if she's in the royal capital.

However, that wasn't a reason to deny Vernoux's 'good-for-nothing' comment, but it's certainly my fault for not being able to make up my mind in a hurry.

"It just had to happen right after she started visiting the castle. I wanted to get along with her a little as 'Sylvester' when she received the permit."

"Oh... I'm sorry about that."

Vernoux averted his eyes.

However, I don't think it's all Vernoux's fault at that time. I was a little happy, so Clay found out that Dilly was coming, and things ended up like that.

"There's no use crying about it now."

"Your depression at that time was amazing. You were really worried about Dilly too."

"It doesn't matter how I felt, but whose fault was it that Dilly got injured?"

"My bad."

I was jealous that Vernoux could change his mood so easily, but he probably wanted to avoid talking about this. Without concealing that feeling, he brought up a different topic.

"Oh... Come to think of it, it seems like Dilly won't be back for the New Year celebrations."

"Yeah. Isma and Elvis will be working anyways. She said she met Cyrus in Ertiga."

"Ertiga isn't close enough for us to go incognito."

"It's not that far that I wouldn't be able to go if I make up some ridiculous excuse."

"Don't do that. Clay will get angry if you do."

Vernoux shrugged, and a knock echoed in the room.

"Excuse me, Sylvester-sama."

It was Clay who Vernoux was just talking about.

“Wow, speak of the devil...”

Vernoux said in a small voice, but fortunately, his voice died down before the door opened.

Still, Clay sent an icy gaze to Vernoux when he came into the room.

“Vernoux-dono. Where on earth are you sitting?”

“Well, it’s a good position to look at paperwork right now.”

“Even children understand that a desk is not a chair...”

Ah, he’s angry after all. However, Vernoux, who had made Clay angry, didn’t seem like he would put up with it at all and got off the desk in disappointment.

“Why didn’t you tell Vernoux-dono to get off the desk, Sylvester-sama?”

“No, His Highness did tell me to. I just didn’t get off.”

“Why don’t you obey what your Lord tells you to do!?”

“Well, isn’t it fine when no one’s around?”

“You don’t know when someone would enter the room! I entered, didn’t I?!”

“I knew it was you from your voice and didn’t get off.”

Ah, they’ve started already.

However, when I see them interacting, I remembered Dilly again.

Come to think of it, Clay also thinks of Dilly as a threat.

Clay hasn’t said anything about Dilly in particular since their first meeting. Well, he probably doesn’t say anything because he doesn’t know that I’m exchanging letters with her as 『Gille』. Even so, he didn’t like it when I had matches with the Earl before, but it doesn’t seem like he minds now.

It’s good that he doesn’t hate it anymore, but I’m a bit curious to know if something happened between him and Dilly. However, if he suspects something because I brought Dilly up, then Dilly might be troubled. That’s why I’ve been trying to find the right timing to bring it up, but...

“Oh, Clay. What’s that?”

“... It’s nothing.”

A letter slipped onto where the documents were placed from Clay’s chest pocket, and Vernoux’s gaze was glued on it. Clay immediately picked it up and put it into his inner pocket, but that letter is definitely from her.

“That sealing wax. I recognise it.”

Clay probably didn’t intend to talk about it, but he sighed at Vernoux’s words and took it out again to show Vernoux.



“... Of course, you would. It belongs to the Pameradia House.”

“Eh, who are you writing to?”

“It doesn’t matter, right?”

“No, wait... Well, it isn’t the Earl, and if you’re not writing to Cyrus-dono, then you’re not writing to Isma-dono. Which means... don’t tell me it’s from Dilly?”

“So what?”

Clay put the envelope away while showing his disgust to Vernoux, who didn’t hide his surprise.

Clay didn’t notice, since he wasn’t looking this way, but I think I looked stupid too.

“Huh? Clay and Dilly are on bad terms... I mean, Clay you hated Dilly a lot, didn’t you?”

“We don’t have a good relationship now either. We’re just communicating for gains.”

Clay replied indifferently, but Vernoux and I were surprised since we hadn’t heard about this from Dilly.

“What? Weren’t you saying she’ll cause harm to His Highness or something like that before? So, why are you interacting with her?”

“I still have concerns about her now, but she’s a little weird and has bad taste, so I don’t have to worry.”

“What?”

“Anyway, His Highness and Earl Pameradia aren’t alike at all, so it’s fine, right?”

The words that Clay had clearly stated were correct, but they pierced my heart. I know we don’t look alike, but I want him to respect my feelings since I’m trying my best to reach her ideal type. Well, Clay doesn’t know about this, so I guess he can’t respect my feelings.

“Besides, it’s not like Cordelia-jou doesn’t listen to what people say. At least, she listens more than you, Vernoux-dono.”

I stopped moving reflexively when Clay said that.

Vernoux opened his eyes wide, then grinned.

“Hey, what do you mean...? Is what I’d like to ask, but 『Cordelia-jou』, huh? I should ask you more about that.”

That’s true, I’m sure Clay called her Pameradia-jou. Clay frowned at Vernoux’s question, but I didn’t stop the conversation because I wanted to know as well.

“It’s not a big deal. She just told me to call her that.”

“『Just』. If you don’t want to call her that, then you would have definitely refused.”

I agree with what Vernoux had said. I was also shocked that Dilly had said something like that.

Dilly and Clay haven't known each other for very long, and they've met as much as 『Sylvester』 had met up with Dilly, but they've talked enough for this type of conversation to pop up. It doesn't feel like they would have that type of conversation. I felt a little frustrated when I thought that, and I wanted to know how he got her to ask him to call her that.

Clay sighed unpleasantly at Vernoux when I thought that.

“You know about it too, right? We talked because of what happened with the miss from the Clydereine House.”

“Oh, that? So that's where your interests match.”

“What else is there?”

Vernoux sounded shocked, and Clay replied indifferently. But, judging from how Clay was behaving, he wasn't writing to her against his will. If he was, then he would be angry.

When I see how Clay is acting, I thought that I would hate it if he became my rival in love, though I wouldn't say it out loud. Clay said that he was writing to Cordelia for gains, but Cordelia is away from the royal capital, so how could she get information about the Clydereine House... when I think about these things, I felt that they could talk about other things as well.

Leaving that aside, I've also heard from Clay that Clydereine-jou had falsely accused Dilly. The day when she came to the castle with Earl Clydereine, she quarrelled with Dilly... or rather, she criticised Dilly one-sidedly. Clay was quite angered by Clydereine-jou's etiquette, but I think he was furious because it had something to do with me... It seems like he was worried about Dilly too.

Honestly, if what Clydereine-jou said was true... if Dilly really came to see me, then how welcoming would that be? However, Dilly would stop interacting with me unless she needed to if that were to spread.

I get a headache when I wonder what she would do.

I've never met Clydereine-jou, so I can't complain about her... but, it's quite annoying that someone whom I don't know at all is doing something I don't want, for my sake.

I thought that and suddenly realised.

I wonder if Dilly avoided me since long ago to escape from such troublesome things.

If Dilly's type is someone like Earl Pameradia, then I wouldn't be her type, but she wouldn't avoid me just because I wasn't her type.

But, what if she wanted to distance herself from me because of my position as 『Prince』 and not because of me personally? She might not have been able to predict the things that would happen because of Clydereine-jou, but she might have guessed that people would criticise her if she got close to me. I also intend to understand what my position is.

Of course, I'm not confident that this is true, nor do I have any proof, but I can't deny the possibility.

But after thinking a bit, the things I can do won't change, even if that's her reason for avoiding me.

After all, no matter the reason, if Dilly doesn't take an interest in me then nothing will start. That's why I have to become someone who she will be interested in, so I need to become someone who I can be proud of.

No matter how big I talk, the biggest problem right now is talking about my identity, and it's pathetic since this problem started before I even reached the start line.

"So, how often do you two write to each other?"

"Not that often. If you ask how often, then it's about as often as before."

"I don't know how often that is."

Vernoux and Clay continued talking even while I was thinking.

I should stop them soon since Clay was gradually looking gloomier, but I was also a little curious, so I decided to wait until the last second.

Then, Clay sighed deeply.

"I'm not the only one who writes to Cordelia-jou. She writes a lot to the Hale sisters, and to the people who are doing welfare work with her."

"Why do you know that?"

"..."

I'm sure Vernoux wanted Clay to say it because he knew that they were chatting in their letters.

"Vernoux, you shouldn't insist on knowing what people write in letters."

"Are you saying you're not curious, Your Highness?"

Vernoux, who was grinning and speaking in an unnatural voice, also seemed to be saying 『If you're going to say something like that, then I won't tell you even if you ask about it』. But Clay would get really angry if things carry on like this, and the words I said were my true feelings. Even I want to hide the things said in letters.

"You can just ask Cordelia-jou about it yourself if you're curious. It's not weird to send your childhood friend a letter, right?"

"By myself, huh. Well, that's true."

Vernoux had easily backed down, so he was probably going to stop teasing Clay soon. Clay, who was no longer entangled with Vernoux, sighed and turned to me before speaking.

"Your Highness. About Clydereine-jou... She's still doing dream fortunes and is apparently respected by the people."

"Are her dreams true?"

"Basically. Therefore, some people want to introduce her to you, including Earl Clydereine, her father."

I shrugged at those words.

“We will meet somewhere if they just want us to meet, but that’s probably not what they want.”

“Yes.”

“I’ll keep in mind that I might not be able to avoid it. The Clydereine House is a house that can’t be taken lightly.”

Clay nodded at my words, bowed, and then left the room.

I’m grateful that he’s a workaholic, but I’m more concerned about what I’d just heard instead of being deeply grateful.

“It would have been great if all her dreams were false. Only the part about Dilly is different... I wonder why that is?”

“Who knows? She’s pretty vicious if she did it intentionally, and if her fortunes are like other fortunes, then they’re not always correct. In any case, it’s a little too dangerous for you to rely on that power considering your position.”

Vernoux said as he shrugged.

Her power is preposterous if she could really see the future.

But...

“I want to be able to create my own future without being deceived by other’s dreams. Of course, I’m not going to rely on dreams that trap people.”

“Well, do your best to convince those around you if you want it to be that way. Fortunately, Their Majesties aren’t positive about marrying you to Clydereine-jou, and you just need to persist. I can help you too.”

I nodded.

I know some people want Clydereine-jou to become queen, and I can imagine that Dilly would receive harsh treatment from others the stronger those voices get. Considering Dilly’s position as Earl Pameradia’s daughter, it wouldn’t be surprising if people viewed her as the number one obstacle for Clydereine-jou.

Dilly has used her own power to get people to recognise her ability and personality. So, she has a lot of allies, and it probably won’t be easy for her to fall into a predicament.

But if she were to be hurt by unfounded words, then I want to help her either as 『Sylvester』 or 『Gille』.

And, if I want to protect her, then I have to let people realise that my words are trustworthy. If they think my words are too light, then they would only react to it like how I’m reacting to the words of the Dreamer Girl right now.

Thinking that, I dropped my eyes onto the third page of the letter I was going to read.

『I look forward to going to the flower field again when I get back.』

That one sentence blew away the dark feelings inside me.

I can only try my best right now.

So that she would think of me as someone she could rely on a little when she gets back...

Act 53: Binding Hope and Path Forward

Translator: Blushy

Editor: SenjiQ

Dear Gille-sama,

I haven't sent you a letter in a very long time.

How are you?

It is already hot here every day, but this is the season when the flowers are in full bloom, so everyone in town seems a little restless.

I am also enjoying the flowers, but I feel even more excited because it is time to harvest the clove buds. I am looking forward to using it as spice and essential oils from now on.

Well, I will be back in the royal capital next month, but before I return, I will be visiting Ertiga with my aunt, so I look forward to dining with my brother and sister-in-law.

Also, I have been spending my time meaningfully by doing things such as checking the herb garden in the outskirts and checking on the essential oil workshop which is only waiting for official operations.

The herbs are growing well, and I am sure you would enjoy them if you saw them ———

Cordelia was doing a good job writing her letter until there, then she re-read what she had written and stopped writing.

“... If I just write this, then it could be misleading.”

The words she had muttered to herself vanished in the room, but the thought she'd just had didn't go away.

(It sounds as if I'm inviting him out on a date.)

Cordelia folded the letter in four and put it into the drawer. Fortunately, her childhood friend wasn't here to rush her to write the letter, so she didn't have to write it quickly.

“It'll be easier for him to understand if I write 『Gille-sama and Witch-sensei』 instead of just 『Gille-sama』.”

If I write that, then I'm sure Gille-sama wouldn't have to worry about something strange.

In a month, Cordelia's life in Weltoria fief will come to an end.

She experienced many things that she couldn't have if she remained in the royal capital such as doing miscellaneous work according to Nirupama's instructions, visiting various fiefs with Nirupama, putting together negotiation documents, and organising tea parties.

She still continued to earn money through trading while doing all those things, exchanged letters with Ronnie, a magician who remained in the royal capital, to find out about the situation in the greenhouse, and checked on the progress at Ertiga's herb garden. Nirupama would get angry and yell at her a lot, "Go to bed already!" because she was doing so many things.

(I also discovered and learnt many things here... My biggest harvest is discovering the clove buds.)

The clove trees which grew on an island in the middle of a vast lake were big, and it was challenging to collect the clove buds, but she used the steam distillation method on the buds and had obtained essential oils from them.

Clove bud essential oils are said to be good for when one wanted to improve their memory or concentrate and is best combined with rosemary essential oil. However, although eugenol, the main component of clove bud essential oil, has a strong antibacterial and antiviral effect, it has a strong stimulus, so one needed to be extra careful when using it.

The best thing that Cordelia remembered about this essential oil was its insect repellent effect and anti-mold properties. It becomes a strong insect repellent when used together with an aroma lamp. It was useful in Weltoria since there were more insects here than in the royal capital.

(Insect repellents are essential for a good night's sleep.)

It was a waste if her mind didn't work from lack of sleep since she was finally learning a lot of things. She didn't have to worry about getting bitten by insects much because of the repellent, and she also had a good night's rest.

Also, clove buds could be blended in herbal tea and used as spice for food.

Cloves have various effects, such as improving intestinal movement and preventing headaches and colds. Cordelia had given them out as gifts when she went around for her New Year courtesy calls, and people wanted to try other products as well, so her face quickly spread among the key figures involved with Weltoria fief. She was delighted by their favourable response and planned to mass-produce the other essential oils as well to meet their expectations.

Ertiga's herb garden, the most important place for her essential oil distribution in the royal capital, was full of magic which made it easier to grow plants.

(But, it's unrealistic for me to make enough essential oils for distribution by myself, no matter how many herbs I can harvest.)

Of course, I know that I can make good quality essential oils since I have the Pameradia's unique plant magic. However, I won't be able to mass-produce those oils, and supply won't be able to keep up with demand.

Therefore, Cordelia had prepared a workshop to mass-produce the essential oils near the herb garden while maintaining a certain quality. Instead of the glassware that she had been using until now, she had a large distillation pot prepared, then she hired employees and even made a manufacturing manual. It should be difficult for people to control quality like this.

Nobles continue to pay attention to the oils thanks to the rumour spread by Nirupama, and Vernoux's mother, Marchioness Flantheim.

"I've also found a location for the royal capital store... The rest can wait until I return to the royal capital."

Cordelia planned to set up two shops that handle cosmetics using essential oils; one in the noble district, and one in the commoner's district.

Her father, Elvis, said that he would think about the shop in the noble district. For the commoner's district, she will sell the cosmetics at a corner of the café, which sold crepes and galettes, which she had opened in the royal capital six months ago.

The café was supposed to open after Cordelia had completed her etiquette training, and had returned to the royal capital. However, she wouldn't be able to set up a place to sell the cosmetics in time if she had gone with this plan, so Emina had supervised the opening under Cordelia's command. Another reason why she had opened the café early was that a lot of people had visited the thriving cafes she had in Ertiga and the port town, and asked if she could open another café in the royal capital.

The day before the café opened, Nirupama said she wanted to see the shop, so Cordelia returned to the royal capital with Nirupama and stayed for the night. It was hard for Cordelia to express that she wanted to return to the royal capital, so she was grateful that Nirupama had wanted to see the café.

The interior of the new café was exactly like being in the Pameradia mansion. She was able to enjoy a galette after so long, and she was relieved to see that the people in the royal capital enjoyed the café.

However, Cordelia didn't go back to the Pameradia mansion even though she was finally back in the royal capital. This wasn't the first time she hadn't gone home even though she had the chance to.

She had the chance to come home during the New Year and Founding Festival, but she chose to go to Ertiga and spent time with her older brother, Cyrus, and his wife, Christina. Even if she came home, Elvis and her second brother, Isma, would be busy with work, and she was afraid of what they would think if she had returned home during her studies.

Cordelia didn't want to disturb her newly wedded brother and his wife during her stay in Ertiga, so she often toured the fief with Zeke, the former feudal lord representative, to learn instead of staying in the mansion.

Zeke was delighted to show her around since he had handed his duties as feudal lord to Cyrus and was now only assisting when needed; thus, he had a lot of time. She had a very productive time thanks to that, but because she had spent too much time with Zeke, Christina told her, "You should relax a bit more next time."

(But I'll be able to meet Otou-sama, and Isma-oniisama soon.)

As Cordelia thought this, a light knock came from the door.

"Ojou-sama, I'm coming in."

"Go ahead."

Behind the door was Lara, who had accompanied her from the royal capital. It had been two years since then, and Lara had a calmer aura now.

“Ojou-sama. Viscount Abbott was planning to visit today, but he suddenly cancelled his visit because he feels sick.”

“Oh, does that mean I have the rest of the day off after lunch?”

“Yes. Nirupama-sama said that you can do whatever you want after you finish sorting the documents.”

Cordelia smiled at Lara, who had accurately reported to her.

“Then, your job is done for the day, Lara. I’ve also finished the things I have to do today.”

Cordelia said, and Lara brightened up.

“Yay! Then, Ojou-sama, why don’t we go shopping?”

“That’s a good idea.”

Lara’s serious attitude flew out the window the moment she heard that work was done.

Lara was currently training to be a lady’s attendant, but she still acted the same whenever she didn’t have to work. Cordelia preferred her this way, so she wanted Lara to stay as she was.

“But, you did your work really fast, Ojou-sama. These over here are written amanuensis, and these here are for tea party arrangements... Huh? The last evening party before we return to the royal capital... are you organising this, Ojou-sama?!”

“Yes. I’m inviting all the people who have helped me during my stay.”

Lara looked over Cordelia’s work one by one and gave a long sigh.

“Everything is a dry run for when you turn into an adult, right? As expected of Nirupama-sama... Don’t tell me you’re going to make arrangements for your own debut as well, Ojousama?!”

Lara widened her eyes, and Cordelia smiled wryly.

“I don’t mind doing that, but Otou-sama and Obaa-sama have already made arrangements for that.”

“Oh... I see. Nirupama-sama and Master love you so much, so you can feel relieved about the arrangements.”

Cordelia agreed that she felt relieved about the preparations for her debut, but she was anxious about whether she could play the leading role in a perfectly prepared stage.

However, Cordelia had already made plans to get rid of her anxiety.

“But you’ll be busy if you’re planning the evening party. Let’s not go out?”

“No. I have to find gifts to take back with me to the royal capital, so I want to come with you.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Let’s go take a break together.”

“Of course!”

Cordelia smiled at Lara’s reliable reply.

Yes, her return to the royal capital was just around the corner.

(I wonder how everyone in the royal capital is growing.)

When she thought that, she looked at the letter addressed to Gille.

(Come to think of it, has Gille-sama reached adulthood?)

I still don’t know his background, but I wonder if he’ll reveal it soon. Gille-sama’s real name and appearance, which I dared not ask until he told me himself, will probably be revealed when he reaches adulthood.

The main reason why Gille-sama changed his appearance with Vernoux-sama’s magic is so that he could go incognito. There shouldn’t be a reason why he has to hide his identity when he grows up.

By the way, Vernoux-sama, whose birthday is earlier than mine, has already reached adulthood.

(Gille-sama must have missed the opportunity to tell me his name.)

Thinking back, I don’t have any particular problems with calling him 『Gille』.

“But, that can wait until I’m back in the royal capital.”

I’m looking forward to seeing how everyone has grown since I haven’t returned to the royal capital in a long time, but I’m also worried.

(I wonder what kind of lady Shelley has become.)

My friends in the royal capital —— Hazel from the Hale House, and Clive from the Eames House have occasionally mentioned Shelley in their letters, but their letters don’t really state how she has grown. Shelley hasn’t appeared in public yet, so I wonder if they’ve only heard rumours about her.

(In the game, the 『Heroine』 only appeared in high society after she reached adulthood, so as expected, Shelley will properly make her appearance then too.)

I don’t mean that she’s following the game scenario when I say 『as expected』.

Even if Shelley is an honest and serious 『Heroine』, there were a lot of customs in high society that she needed to learn, so she would need to study for two years.

But then, Shelley is high-maintenance unlike the game 『Heroine』, so I doubt she can understand all the etiquettes like in the game, but she can probably remember them all since she doesn’t like to lose.

(Earl Clydereine doesn’t hide his intention of wanting to marry her to His Highness like always, and Shelley wanted to marry His Highness two years ago as well. She probably won’t seclude herself away.)

Cordelia still hadn’t forgotten Shelley’s hostile gaze on her when they had last met.

(I don’t want the Queen’s seat.)

Therefore, Cordelia wished that Shelley would stop getting her involved, but Shelley probably won't grant Cordelia's wish.

Cordelia also knew that a certain number of ladies had been visiting Earl Clydereine's mansion from the letters, even though it isn't public. It was unlikely that this would end with Cordelia being uninvolved. At any rate, Shelley is a child from a good family and can see into the future with her 『Dreamer Power』. It wasn't strange for nobles to suck up to her, and the Pameradia House's daughter, who has the same rank as Shelley, will become a hindrance.

And, Shelley will turn 16 before Cordelia; her birthday was in eight days.

(It's finally the beginning of 『Cordelia's』 fall.)

When I think about Shelley, I become determined to avoid Prince Sylvester more than ever. At this point, there's nothing that indicates that I will be like the game 『Cordelia』, but there's no reason to approach the Prince since it'll make me anxious.

But, I don't have any intentions of falling into a trap if Shelley continues to confront me like she had declared before.

(... But I have to return to the royal capital and grasp Shelley's movements first.)

Lara tilted her head and stared at Cordelia, who was thinking.

“Ojou-sama, why are you frowning?”

“It's nothing.”

A big match was waiting for Cordelia.

But, I'll enjoy shopping with Lara today, Cordelia changed her mood.

Act 54: At the Royal Capital for the First Time in Ages

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On the day Cordelia was returning to the royal capital, Nirupama looked disappointed.

“I don’t mind if you come here anytime you want. Will you come back when your coming of age banquet is over?”

“Thank you very much. But first, I’d like to use the things that I’ve learnt here in the royal capital.”

“I see, that’s a shame. But, the preparations of the shop seemed to finally be going well... If that’s the case, then should I come visit with my husband for a while? Bruno also feels very sad that you’re leaving.”

Cordelia bowed deeply at Nirupama who said what she wanted even though she knew Cordelia’s reply.

“Thank you for looking after me for two years. Please give my regards to Bruno-ojisama too.”

“Okay, you’ve been great. But promise me that you’ll come visit after everything has settled down, alright? I’m looking forward to your coming of age too.”

Then Cordelia said goodbye to her days in Weltoria and boarded the carriage to the royal capital with Lara.

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When the mansion came into view, Cordelia informed the coachman that she would get off the carriage and slowly walked through the colourful flower garden in her home. She thought it would be more surprising and nostalgic because she was away for a long time, but all she felt was ‘calm’.

“I’m back.”

Cordelia talked to the flowers from time to time as she walked and quickly reached the entrance. A lot of servants were waiting for her there.

“Welcome home, Ojou-sama.”

“Welcome back from your trip.”

Cordelia smiled while receiving greetings from everyone.

“I’m back. I’m glad everyone seems well.”

Then, she asked Emina to distribute the gifts to the servants and went to her room by herself first.

She was somewhat happy that her room hadn’t changed since she left, and her cheeks naturally loosened. She liked her room in Weltoria, but she could relax more in a room that she was familiar with.

“Then, I’ll take a nap to heal my fatigue from travelling... What am I saying? I don’t have the time for that.”

I can’t take things slowly. I have to quickly make gifts for people who will be coming to celebrate my coming of age party.

Cordelia changed into her research clothes then headed to the laboratory. Then, she opened the door and saw that Ronnie was holding a wooden box and putting it away.

“Ah, welcome back. Ojou-sama.”

“I’m back. You seem well.”

It wasn’t a moving reunion and Ronnie seemed as carefree as before. The inside of the laboratory was also the same and it felt as if she had only been gone for a day. However, there were more sweets on the table than before, and there were some which had come from Weltoria.

“Lara must have already popped by since those sweets are on the table.”

“She did. She said, ‘I have to make sure the greenhouse is alright before Ojou-sama comes! ’ and left. She doesn’t seem to trust my management.”

“It’s been a while, so she probably didn’t know what to say to you.”

“Is it like that? It’s been a long time for you too, Ojou-sama, but you don’t seem perplexed at all.”

Ronnie shrugged and Cordelia smiled in amazement. Ronnie’s thick-headedness hasn’t improved at all in these last two years.

“Come to think about it, your coming of age ceremony will be celebrated as a dance ball?”

“Yes.”

The young nobles in this kingdom often celebrated their coming of age ceremonies at dinner parties in the past. However, more nobles have been celebrating it in a showy manner recently, and she heard that a ball was also held for Vernoux’s coming of age ceremony.

“I’m looking forward to it. Does the Master dance as well?”

“I... guess so.”

Ronnie seemed amused, but Cordelia tilted her head since she couldn’t imagine Elvis dancing.

(Ronnie is the same and doesn’t even hold back against his Master.)

But I heard that Cecily, the head magician, doesn’t raise her eyebrows a lot anymore, Cordelia sighed lightly.

“And, did you hear? The Madam wrote the invitations.”

“Huh? Okaa-sama did?”

“Yes. But she won’t attend the evening party herself. I heard that the invitation was very courteous and befitting of a daughter of the Pameradia House.”

“... That’s... nice.”

I still haven’t been able to meet with Okaa-sama, but at least she’s worried about me now. Cordelia smiled a little.

“By the way, since you came here as soon as you came home, what are you going to do?”

“I want to prepare gifts for the people who are coming to the evening party.”

“Eh, gifts? And since you’re preparing them here, are you going to be making essential oils?”

Cordelia smiled at Ronnie’s question.

“I have to greet them at the evening party, don’t I? If I glance at their magic wavelengths, then I can choose which essential oils will suit them. I can roughly guess their favourite fragrance from their magic wavelength.”

“Which means, you’ll have to make a lot of different types so that you’ll have the scent you need.”

“That’s right.”

Cordelia had already started mass-producing essential oils that were ready to be put up for sale.

For sweet and sour citrus aromas, she had orange, grapefruit, lemon, bergamot, lemon grass and melissa. Floral aromas include geranium, neroli (orange flower), roman camomile, German chamomile, and lavender. The refreshing aromas include peppermint, spearmint, rosemary, basil, clary sage and angelica. Woody aromas include tea tree, eucalyptus, juniper, myrtle, and so on. These aromas will be transported from Ertiga on a case-by-case basis.

“You have more variety now. How are you going to distribute them?”

“I plan to put the aroma stones and essential oils in these jewellery boxes, but I feel like it won’t make much of an impact, so I’m thinking of adding a small amount of balms and lotions in there as well.”

“Eh... Doesn’t this jewellery box have a cameo of a rose relief on the lid? Ojou-sama, are you serious?”

Ronnie looked impressed as he stared at the gorgeous jewellery box.

“First impressions are important, aren’t they?”

“Well, you can probably think of it as advertising expenses.”

“That’s right. I can’t read a person’s magic unless I see them in person, so it’s going to be a little tough on the day, but I plan on asking Emina to help me.”

“So, you’re preparing the essential oils now? You’re also going to make different balms, aren’t you?”

Ronnie said and Cordelia laughed.

“I’ll do that tomorrow. Apart from that, there’s something I want to try. Can you get me some jasmine flowers? Get all the ones I have.”

“Jasmine? By any chance, have you finally found a solvent that can be used for roses? The hard work of repeatedly experimenting has finally paid off.”

To extract jasmine oil, I use the same solvent method that is used to extract rose absolute oil.

The solvent extraction process uses organic solvent such as hexane to extract essential oils and is used for plants which have a poor extraction rate with the steam distillation method or when the components in the plant are altered by heat.

“No, I still haven’t gotten to that point yet.”

Cordelia has also tried magic medicine to replace hexane, but she still hasn’t found the best solvent yet. However, even without that medicine, she had obtained a magic medicine that was similar to pure ethanol, so she could also use the enfleurage method.

“Then, how?”

“I had another refining process. So, I wanted to try it with jasmine first.”

She hasn’t come up with this method because she had memories of her previous life, but she has strong magic that specialises in plants which she hadn’t had in her previous world. And, it was possible for her to directly obtain the essential oil from the plant if she grasps her magic analysis training.

(With the solvent extraction method, a little bit of the solvent remains in the essential oil. But if this goes well, then I can gain pure essential oils.)

However, the essential oil content in roses and jasmine is extremely small. I’m worried about whether I can really extract essential oil from them with magic when the oils can’t even be seen with the eye. But since I haven’t found a magic medicine to use, it would be better to bet on this method rather than use the enfleurage method.

“But, Ojou-sama. There are more roses than jasmine in stock right now...”

“Huh?”

“You always use jasmine when you try out whatever medicine you get your hands on, so there’s only a little bit of stock left. So, isn’t it better to use roses for your experiment? If needed, I can prepare a variety of roses other than Ojou-sama’s rose.”

The rose that Ronnie had referred to as 『Ojou-sama’s rose』 is the 『Cordelia』 that she had received from Gille.

She had collected other fragrant roses in addition to 『Cordelia』, but she liked 『Cordelia』 the most. Her favourite scent after the roses have been extracted into rose absolutes won’t necessarily be 『Cordelia』, but she thought that it would be her favourite anyway.

(But if there’s a lot, then I’ll like to try this method with roses.)

The flowers were perfectly preserved thanks to magic tools.

“What do you want to do? I’m fine either way.”

“Alright. Prepare them for me. Bring a bag of roses back with you.”

Ronnie casually went down to the underground warehouse. He didn’t care about Cordelia’s momentous decision at all.

Cordelia relaxed a little from his attitude.

(I can’t help but be nervous since I feel more stronger towards it than the other varieties.)

The roses in the vase were probably put there by Emina before Cordelia returned. She pulled a flower out from the case, concentrated magic into her eyes and searched for information on the rose.

The magic circuit that continued into the veins of the leaf, and a little... she confirmed the presence of a little bit of essential oil.

(I will need fifty roses to get one drop of essential oil from them. So, it’s invisible to the eye.)

Still, Cordelia understood.

Thanks to the magic given to me by the Pameradia House, I can see the magic in the roses and the essential oils that it holds.

“Ojou-sama, I have them.”

“Thanks. Put it here.”

When Ronnie came back from the warehouse, he transferred the roses from the big bag he brought into the glass containers. Cordelia closed her eyes and took a deep breath in front of the roses. Then, she put both hands on top of the flowers and concentrated magic into them.

(Come on, essential oils. Gather in one place...!!)

She slowly opened her eyes which were the same colour as the roses and spoke to them. The speed at which the essential oils were moving through the petals was slower than she thought.

(Rather than slow, it’s heavy...!)

I don’t know if that’s the right word to use, but I wanted to pull the essential oils with my magic, however my magic is being pulled into the essential oils instead. I only concentrated enough to search the roses, but it was stealing my physical strength and magic.

But I won’t give up.

The essential oils are invisible, but my magic and the essential oils are connected and they’re moving. This is an endurance test.

After a long period of time, she collected the essential oils from the petal and a drop finally appeared. Yes, it was just a drop of essential oil, but this was a crystal of hope for Cordelia.

Cordelia smiled.

“You’re forcing the essential oils to collect... Ojou-sama, are you developing an underhanded trick with that?”

“Underhanded trick, hmm. You certainly don’t need tools for this, but it’s not suited for mass production.”

Cordelia wiped the sweat from her forehead, *just collecting enough essential oils for my personal use would require a tremendous amount of magic and physical strength*, but she also felt a sense of accomplishment.

Ronnie shrugged at her gesture.

“Well, that’s right. In order to make the essential oils easier to collect, you’ll have to continue looking for medicine and making them.”

“Yes.”

“Still, I think it’s amazing. Your magic goes well with plants, but you need a lot of control to do what you just did. This is the result of Ojou-sama’s diligence towards magic training.”

“Thanks. But, don’t praise me too much. I don’t know what expression to make.”

“I think it’s fine to express your joy as you want. For now, I’ll prepare the glass container to store the essential oil. It’s still a prototype, but there are some good ones, so please use them.”

“Thanks. That’s helpful.”

“It’s alright. When Ojou-sama went to Nirupama’s place, I said that I received an order from you and didn’t get much work from the magician wing. It’s give-and-take.”

Is it really alright to call that give-and-take?

One way or another, Ronnie is soft-hearted, so I think he would do his job at the magician wing if they asked him to... As usual, he’s still an honest person who says what he wants to say without hiding anything.

(It’s nice for me, but Ronnie should become a little more streetwise.)

Cordelia stared at Ronnie as he left the room and couldn’t help but be a little disappointed.

(Leaving Ronnie’s matter aside for the time being, I can barely make it in time for the evening party if I think about my magic consumption, recovery and how much essential oils I can draw from the flowers.)

In any case, Cordelia got the rose essential oils that she had hoped for.

She understood the mood from the previous challenge, so she decided to take a rest before refining essential oils again and stared at the essential oil that she had just made.

“I don’t know if the fragrance will reach him...”

Cordelia took a plain piece of paper out of the cupboard and pushed the essential oil against the edge of the paper.

“I hope that it will become a pleasant fragrance by the time it reaches him.”

She said as she ran her pen on the paper.

『I have returned to the royal capital. I also made the essential oils. I will contact you again. 』

I want to deliver this scent to Gille-sama as soon as possible since he gave me the rose. I want him to think it smells good, and I want him to be surprised by the rose aroma that was obtained with the steam distillation method —— a fragrance that is different from rose otto.

She thought this and put the blank piece of paper into an envelope so that the scent wouldn’t evaporate. She will seal it after writing her letter tonight.

And, there are also other people who she had to inform about her return.

“Ah, come to think of it, Ojou-sama. Master will be back by the time the sun sets.”

Ronnie reappeared again with a glass container and Cordelia thanked him for informing her.

Yes, first, I must report Otou-sama since he had let me go to Weltoria.

◆◆◆◆◆

Cordelia repeatedly looked out the window from her room as Elvis’s scheduled time to arrive home approached. She understood that someone would inform her when he got home, but she felt tensed and was worried about what was happening outside.

(Don’t, stop looking. Calm down.)

This behaviour is not befitting for an ideal lady who I’m aiming to be. She took a deep breath and cleared her head.

However, she noticed a problem when she calmed down.

“What should I talk to him about after I welcome him home...?”

She wanted to report on her training period after she had finished getting the materials ready, but she hadn’t unpacked yet and a part of her luggage hadn’t arrived at the royal capital. Elvis will probably give her a chance to report later.

So she thought she should start with something fun, but it was hard to choose a topic that Elvis would enjoy.

Cordelia was hesitating and Lara laughed at her.

“Ojou-sama, shall I prepare some tea for you to calm down?”

“Thanks, but I’m not in the mood for tea.”

“Then, shall I re-do your hair? It might distract you a little.”

“It’s a shame since you spent such a long time getting my hair done this morning.”

Lara, who had been doing Cordelia’s hair every day in Weltoria, and had gotten good at it because Nirupama suddenly said, “Why don’t you try this hairstyle on Cordelia today?”

“Then shall I prepare hot chocolate? The temperature will rise soon, and you won’t be able to enjoy it anymore.”

Lara said before lightly leaving the room.

Cordelia didn’t mean that she wanted to drink something other than tea, and it was getting hot already. She smiled wryly since she didn’t even have time to stop Lara. Maybe hot chocolate was something that Lara enjoyed drinking. However, she felt a little relieved to see Lara acting like her usual self.

When the cup that Lara had prepared for her became empty, Cordelia was told that Elvis had returned home.

She headed to the entrance while feeling nervous, and Elvis was acting the same as usual as he gave Hans some orders.

Even so, he noticed that she had appeared. Hans seemed to have noticed the change in Elvis’s attitude and stepped back while smiling.

Apparently the matter wasn’t urgent, and Elvis had already told Hans everything he needed to.

“Welcome home, Otou-sama.”

Cordelia said and suddenly noticed.

He had just come back, but would it have been better if I informed him that I had returned first?

Elvis had widened his eyes for a second and didn’t seem to mind.

“... Yeah.”

Cordelia was relieved by his brief reply. Apparently, the words she had said to him hadn’t been wrong.

However, she was surprised by what Elvis said next.

“You seem well like always.”

“Th-thank you very much.”

She knew that he cared about her from long ago, but it was rare for him to tell her this directly. Cordelia’s expression cracked and she laughed. Hans smiled widely when he saw her.

“Master, shall I prepare some tea?”

“Yeah, in the sunroom.”

Elvis replied briefly and returned to his room. Apparently, he was indicating that she should go and wait for him there.

The Pameradia mansion's sunroom, which was rarely used to host tea parties, was used less frequently than in other mansions. Thus, there were a lot of potted plants in the room instead of already cut flowers.

Cordelia waited while looking at the plants and Elvis finally appeared with Hans. Elvis sat down and so did Cordelia. Hans prepared the tea and then left.

"Otou-sama. This gift is for you."

Cordelia held out a box that was decorated with five rock glasses.

There were a lot of coloured glass products in Weltoria that were manufactured with sandblasting. There was also a lot of cider there as well since the climate was warm and they could harvest a lot of different types of fruits, and so glass production is also prosperous there.

"Please use it if you don't mind."

"... Ah."

Elvis didn't immediately take the glass out of the box to look at it, but Cordelia didn't miss him saying, "With this we can drink the promised alcohol..."

It seemed like he was speaking to himself, and he hadn't noticed that he had done so. However, Cordelia was happy since he had remembered that she had asked him to choose an alcohol for them to drink once she reached adulthood.

"It seems like you've learnt a lot under Countess Weltoria."

Elvis muttered while picking up the cup and continued.

"It seemed like she wanted to keep you by her side for a little longer. A while ago, Bruno-dono sent me a grievance letter saying, 『I'm losing an excellent secretary』."

"Did Nirupama-obasama and Bruno-ojisama praise me that much?"

"Yeah. The Weltorias said that they will welcome you anytime. If you want to visit them again, then you can. They'll also welcome you for long visits as well."

Cordelia wondered if this was about what they have been telling her since she was younger; about how they wanted to adopt her and teach her how to manage the fief, but Elvis's attitude gave her the impression that they were forced to make a decision.

"You can just do what you want. It is evident that your ideas are wanted from your evaluation at the competition show. Countess Weltoria also said it was too early."

Elvis continued since he had guessed what Cordelia was thinking.

"Thank you very much, Otou-sama."

Cordelia also reached for her cup. There was hibiscus tea, which Cordelia had brought back as a gift, in the cup. Originally, there was no custom of using roselle flowers in tea at Weltoria fief, but the acidity of the flower suited those in Weltoria, so making tea leaves from the flower's calyx quickly spread throughout the fief. Hibiscus contains a lot of citric acid and malic acid, so it can be expected to improve blood flow, prevent lifestyle diseases, recover fatigue and lower cholesterol levels. What was poured in the cup right now was blended with rosehip and tasted much more mellow.

"However, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't rush. If you want to be a feudal lord, then you should hurry up and make your decision. This will also be connected to your marriage."

Cordelia answered, "Yes," and froze half-way.

(Ma-marriage...?)

Cordelia needed a few seconds to understand what he had meant.

(That's right, I...!!)

Having spent her time being busy in Weltoria, Cordelia forgot that she was also at the age where she had to take that seriously.

(I thought that I would have more encounters with men now that I'm able to go to the Big Bookcase...)

Was what she had thought, but in the end, she went to Weltoria to study, so nothing would have changed even if she hadn't forgotten.

However, this was the first time since she was four years old that Elvis clearly mentioned her marriage. He had basically stated 『The plan to marry you into the royal family has been scrapped』.

(So, there is still a lot of freedom for me to choose who I want to marry...? If so, then I might be able to experience my first love!)

When she thought that, her cheeks naturally got hotter.

She thought that she had to remain calm in front of Elvis, but she naturally relaxed when he informed her clearly that she didn't need to marry into the royal family.

However, in contrast to Cordelia, the glare in Elvis's eyes sharpened.

"... Otou-sama?"

"... Anyway, it's still too early to think about this. At least, wait until you're an adult."

"Huh? Y-yes."

But she would become an adult in one month. She felt like it wasn't too early to talk about this.

"The first person who will dance with you at your coming of age ceremony is Isma."

It wasn't particularly weird for Cordelia to dance with her family members first since she didn't have a fiancée, but she was a bit disappointed that Elvis wouldn't be the one who was dancing with her.

"And, this is from Marquis Flantheim."

“From Marquis Flantheim? It’s rare for him to write me a letter.”

“... It’s not like he will write anything decent anyway, but I’ll give it to you.”

“Yes, I’ve received it properly.”

“I happened to meet him on my way home. He knew you were back for some reason and said he would come over, but I didn’t listen to him. I managed to leave him behind, but I was home late because of him.”

Of course, Cordelia hadn’t told the Marquis that she was back in the royal capital and she hadn’t even told Vernoux. *Did he perhaps guess that I was back because Otou-sama went home from the castle earlier than usual?*

Cordelia couldn’t open the letter in front of Elvis, who seemed dissatisfied, and talked about the water technology that she had studied in Weltoria and about the personal connections she had made while there. She didn’t delve much into the details since Elvis had told her to tell him later, but it became dark before she realised, so she returned to her room until dinner time.

When Cordelia returned to her room, she cut open the seal on the letter from Marquis Flantheim and five pieces of paper were neatly folded inside. He was completely different from Vernoux who finished his letters in a few sentences, and Cordelia smiled wryly when she thought about how Marquis Flantheim had made Elvis wait until he had finished writing the letter.

The letter began with how he had met Elvis by chance. After that, he continued to write about his wife, Sara, for what felt like forever, so Cordelia decided to put those aside for now and skipped three pages of writing. Then, in the second half of the fourth page, he wrote that he would be attending the Pameradia’s evening party.

『I asked Elvis if he would be dancing with you, but he only answered me with a vicious glare. I’ve never seen him dance before, so I was really looking forward to it. 』

Cordelia, who saw this sentence, thought that Elvis didn’t dance because the Marquis had gone out of his way to say something like that.

『When I asked him if Vernoux could dance with you, he didn’t even react to me. 』

Cordelia felt exhausted when she saw this sentence.

The Marquis might not have been serious about that, but if such a thing had happened, then it would become a state of emergency where people will think that Vernoux is her fiancé.

Vernoux was a very reliable friend, but she didn't think that they had any feelings of love between them. On the contrary, if she had told this to the person himself, then he would snort and make fun of her, "What? Did you fall in love with me?"

However, Cordelia tilted her head and wondered what kind of lady Vernoux would marry in the future. The Marquis had said, 『Find your own wife! 』, but she couldn't imagine him flirting with a lady.

"Well, putting Vernoux-sama's future aside, I have to worry about my own future."

Even though one of her fears had completely disappeared thanks to Elvis's words, she still had concerns.

Yes, they were about Shelley.

"... If we don't have to see each other, then that's fine."

However, things probably won't go that way. Rumours of her adulthood have even reached Cordelia. It seemed like she had not grown into a docile lady.

She pulled herself together and put the letter in her desk. *I'll read about his wife slowly later,* she thought before heading to the dining room.

◆◆◆◆◆

Cordelia reached the day before her birthday evening party while preparing for various things.

"I thought I might be a little nervous, but it's beyond my expectations. I'm extremely nervous right now."

Cordelia was drinking tea in the greenhouse to calm down, but her nerves wouldn't settle down at all. Emina smiled at her.

"It's a grand occasion, so please have fun... Is what I would like to say, but I can understand how you feel. I couldn't sleep the night before either."

"You couldn't sleep either, Emina?"

"Yes. My speech flew right out of my head, and I desperately tried to keep it together."

"That's exactly how I feel right now."

Cordelia shrugged a little at Emina's words.

She still felt a bit nervous, but she was able to calm down a little bit after she heard that she wasn't the only one to feel like this.

"You'll be fine, Ojou-sama. Shall I help you as much as I can tomorrow?"

“Thanks. All I can do today is eat well, sleep well and prepare for tomorrow. The problem is whether I will be able to get a good night’s sleep or not.”

She thought that she wouldn’t be able to calm down if she wasn’t doing anything, but she had already finished all the preparations that she had to do. All that was left was to attend the party with a perfect condition.

She pondered over how to kill time and Lara came carrying a cloth.

“Ojou-sama, I’ve moved all the presents for tomorrow near the venue.”

“Thanks.”

“And, Vernoux-sama is here.”

“Huh? Now? Really?”

“Yes. He said he was just going to leave a message, but I thought you would like to see him, so I stopped him from leaving.”

“Hmm, thank you for stopping him. I’ll go see him now.”

But, what did he come here for?

Cordelia rushed to the entrance with that question in mind.

A young blonde, who was much taller than she remembered, was waiting for her at the entrance.

Cordelia stopped breathing for a second at his appearance.

She didn’t fall in love with him.

(It’s the face of 『Vernoux Flantheim』 …!)

Vernoux is Vernoux, but she was shocked that her childhood friend had grown into the same figure as the game and her face stiffened for a moment.

“Hey, it’s been a while.”

His high voice seemed to have lowered slightly, but his tempo was still of the same childhood friend who she knew well. When she heard his voice, she dropped her shoulders slightly and relaxed.



“It’s been a while, Vernoux-sama. You still visit suddenly like always.”

“You haven’t changed at all since you still say something like that. Well, I could tell from your letters.”

“I’m glad you look well, Vernoux-sama.”

Two years was a long time even though they were talking casually to each other.

Vernoux’s young looks had disappeared, and he had grown a head taller than her even though he was the same height as her when they were younger. However, his mischievous aura hadn’t changed at all.

(Even if his nature hasn’t changed, he’s at the age when his appearance changes greatly.)

If it’s like this, then Gille-sama might have changed a lot too.

“But, did you shrink a little Dilly?”

“Stop joking. You’ve grown.”

“I have, but I’m a little surprised you’re smaller than I thought you were. Weren’t you taller a while ago?”

“I’m tall among the women of my age. If I wear heels, then I’ll be even taller.”

“Ah, that dangerous weapon?”

Vernoux looked clearly dejected at the word “heels”.

“Did someone, perhaps, step on you?”

“If I hadn’t been stepped on, then I wouldn’t have known the horror of that deadly weapon.”

“Oh my. The Vernoux who reluctantly went to the houses of ladies because the Marquis took him there is now dancing with ladies... You’ve grown up.”

“Don’t say misleading things. Even if I don’t dance, a lot of things happen in the adult world.”

“Even if you say you’re an adult, aren’t we the same age? Even I will become an adult tomorrow.”

Cordelia wondered what kind of wonderful lady stepped on her childhood friend’s feet with heels and sighed. Vernoux laughed.

“I came to deliver something to celebrate you becoming an 『adult』. I could have given it to you tomorrow, but he’ll be happier if I gave it to you today.”

“This is?”

“Open it. It’s from Gille.”

Cordelia opened the bag without hesitation when she heard Vernoux say that. She looked at the item inside and took it out in surprise.

It was a gorgeous hair ornament made of rose flowers. Not only roses, but there was also ribbon lace and baby’s breath on the ornament.

“Beautiful.”

“Gille made that.”

“Huh?”

Gille-sama might have made this?

“He also suffered a lot while making flower crowns a long time ago.”

“Oh, he practiced a lot after that. Maybe, he can make it better than you now, Dilly. He’s always been skilful, and he hates to lose.”

“Fufu, I know that too.”

He seems skilful, but I didn’t think he could make something like this.

“Gille-sama always amazes me. But, there’s nothing more surprising than the time when I first met him.”

“Well, it would be nice if you aren’t surprised by him anymore.”

“This isn’t a fresh flower, right? But it isn’t an artificial flower or dried flowers...”

The rose, which was as soft as fresh flowers, was just like a preserved flower.

“I don’t know much about it, but Gille worked hard to make it. I’m sure he had another hair ornament prepared, but you can preserve that without having to use it at tomorrow’s evening party.”

“Still, the fact that you brought it today means that I’ll look pretty if I wear it at the evening party tomorrow?”

“I won’t deny that. Well, I can’t confirm that either since I don’t know what colour your dress will be.”

She had prepared some hair ornaments for tomorrow, but she could tell at a glance that this suited her.
Let’s talk about this with Emina and I’ll also ask Otou-sama about it too.

Cordelia thought and Vernoux coughed on purpose.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh, this is sudden, but I think it’s time for me to stop being a delivery man.”

“Huh?”

“Gille has already turned sixteen. If you want to deliver letters to each other, then you can do it yourselves. It’s weird for me to be your middleman forever right? Well, I won’t stop right away, but I’ll be telling Gille that I’ll be stopping soon too.”

Vernoux said and Cordelia suddenly noticed.

(If I don’t know Gille-sama’s real name, and I can’t use Vernoux as a delivery man, then we won’t be able to get in touch. Still, it’s a bit sad that he’s still hiding it.)

She stayed silent because she knew that Vernoux was teasing her, but rather than gradually growing lonelier, she felt that she couldn’t even have any complaints if he didn’t tell her his name.

(But if I miss the timing, then it's a good opportunity.)

If he would state it clearly, then Cordelia would welcome it.

“Then, just one thing. Will you send him a thank you note from me?”

“Oh, I'll deliver your letters anytime Dilly. You haven't been told how to contact him, and you're not hiding anything, are you?”

Cordelia only smiled at Vernoux's question.

I don't know if it's a secret, but he's been hiding it for a long time.

He might have been worried that I would feel weird if he told me, ——— but how can I tell him that I was reincarnated into the world of a game?

It's not like I'm at some kind of disadvantage from Vernoux-sama or Gille-sama just because Gille-sama is hiding who he is.

“What's wrong?”

“No, it's nothing.”

“I see. Well then, I'm going home now.”

“Oh my, you're really going home fast.”

“I'm quite busy, and I'll be coming tomorrow anyway.”

Before, he would at least enjoy some tea, so he must be really busy.

“Are you disappointed?”

“Don't joke. But Vernoux-sama, you're already a grown man. If you visit my house that often, then the ladies wouldn't be able to remain calm.”

Vernoux-sama has good parentage, his personality and looks are also good, and he has a lot of elements that are liked by women, so I wasn't really joking.

(Come to think of it, I wonder what relationship he has with Hazel-sama now since she knows this well.)

I received letters from Hazel-sama and Vernoux-sama while I was in Weltoria, but I didn't receive any that mentioned both their names.

Vernoux lifted the edge of his mouth as if interrupting Cordelia's thoughts.

“Oh? Am I that fine of a man?”

“Yes, I think you have a good personality.”

“You've said too much. Then, I'll see you tomorrow.”

Vernoux said while turning around and Cordelia waved at him lightly.

“Since Vernoux-sama is coming, I can't say that I'm nervous.”

Along with those words, Cordelia got hyped up for her evening party tomorrow.

Act 55: The Fragrant Lady and Blossoms at the Coming of Age Banquet

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Double release until the 4th of July! Please thank patreons patrons /o/

It was finally the day of Cordelia's coming of age evening party.

Cordelia was waiting for her turn with Isma. She was told that she would appear in front of the guests when the signal appears after Elvis's speech.

After I enter, I will bow to everyone, dance with Isma-oniisama and then greet the guests with Otou-sama. By doing this, I can choose which aromas to give the guests —— she went over this in her mind and Isma laughed next to her.

"I thought you would be calm, but you're not smiling."

"... Really?"

"It's okay. You're beautiful, so you only have to act dignified. The new aroma also suits you well. What scent is that?"

"It's the scent of roses. I changed the way I extracted essential oils."

"Did you use the same flower?"

"Yes. It's the red rose in the greenhouse."

"Oh, the extraction method changes the aroma a lot."

Isma said and looked as if he was in deep thought, so Cordelia tilted her head.

"Onii-sama? What's wrong?"

"You used the rose you've been planting in the greenhouse for that scent, right?"

"Yes. My friend's mother does selective breeding on roses, and he gave me one."

"I see..."

"Is something wrong with that rose?"

"No, I've seen a similar flower at the royal castle. But, it's probably a different breed."

Cordelia's rose, which emphasized on fragrance, didn't have any special characteristics on its petals. There are many other red roses, and Isma might have made a mistake.

"You take good care of that rose, don't you Cordelia?"

"Yes, it's my favourite flower."

The fragrance was different from the one in my previous life but due to the difference in rose varieties and extraction methods, it's definitely my favourite.

(The first leading stage in my life... The environment and my condition should be at the best.)

Cordelia thought as she raised her face and stared straight at the door.

The butler, Hans, looked inside the hall and looked for an opportunity for Cordelia to enter.

“Now, it’s time. Cordelia, your hand.”

“Yes, Onii-sama.”

“Your smile is back to how it normally is. I’ll say it once again, congratulations on becoming an adult.”

“Thank you very much.”

“The only disappointing thing about today is that I’m your partner. It would have been alright if you had a nice fiancé. Well, I don’t have one either, so you’ll have to put up with me today.”

Isma joked and Cordelia desperately tried not to laugh.

Then, the hall door was opened, and the sight was more dazzling than she had imagined it to be.

The hall was glistening from the chandelier and lamps, and the gazes of the guests which all turned to her at once made her feel this way.

Strangely enough, she wasn’t as nervous as when she was waiting.

She didn’t have that much time, but she was able to observe her surroundings calmly. She had hammered the names and faces of those who were coming tonight, so she could see the people in front of her and from the corner of her eyes. There shouldn’t be anyone who didn’t attend.

She could also hear the people’s voices clearer than she had thought. Among them, there were people talking about the fragrance she was wearing, and a smile naturally appeared on her face.

Then, as she proceeded into the hall, she could see Nirupama, Marquis Flantheim and his wife, and Vernoux and she also noticed an unexpected person.

(That’s... Onee-sama?)

She gazed over there unintentionally because she saw Malvina Owens, Cyrus’s twin who only her brothers have met before and she was married to the Duke’s second son. Rumour has it, her husband will soon take over the Earl fief from his mother’s side which is situated in an important position.

It wasn’t strange for Malvina to be here since she was Cordelia’s blood related sister, but Cordelia rarely had any memories of her, and she never showed up at home after she got married. However, Malvina’s expression was calm, and she seemed genuinely happy that her sister had reached adulthood. *It’s so strange since we barely have a relationship*, she thought as she proceeded to the middle of the hall.

Then, after confirming that Elvis, who had met her eye, had nodded, Cordelia took her hand off Isma, turned and bowed gracefully.

“Thank you very much for coming this evening. My name is Cordelia Enna Pameradia and I will be joining you tonight. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

She smiled.

A warm applause broke out from the surroundings, and the orchestra began playing a delicate tone.

“Can I have your hand, Lady?”

“You may, Onii-sama.”

She took Isma’s hand again when he had jokingly said that and took a step in time with the music.

(I wonder when it was that I was able to dance in triple time which I had desperately tried to practice since I wasn’t good at it)

I think it’s also thanks to Isma-oniisama leading, but my efforts paid off.

“You look like you’re having fun.”

“Yes, a lot of fun.”

Thus, she could have small talk with Isma.

“I’ve always thought that you weren’t afraid of anything, but you really are a big-shot.”

“Oh my, I do have something I’m scared of.”

“Ghost stories? Are you still afraid of them?”

“H-how do you know about that?”

I’m sure I’ve never told him this before so how did he find out?

However, she concluded that Ronnie was the only person who could have let slip that she feared ghost stories. And, Isma seemed to have realised that.

“You seem to have a good relationship with Ronnie, more than anyone else.”

“I think so too. But Ronnie didn’t have to tell you.”

“Sorry, my bad. I shouldn’t have said it now. But I’ll leave it at that.”

When the song ended, Cordelia bowed gracefully and raised her face again.

“Everyone, please enjoy the night.”

Then, after assuring that the aura in the room had softened, Cordelia walked over to Elvis with Isma. Even if Elvis was the organiser of this evening party, he was as expressionless as usually.

“You’re back?”

“Yes, Otou-sama.”

“Good job Isma. Cordelia, it’s time for your real task.”

“Yes.”

Yes, it’s time to greet people once the announcements are over.

I have to observe who the people are, and I want to remember what I can talk to them about when we meet next, but there are a lot of people here.

If I don't keep it together then I might slip up, she hyped herself up and a bright voice sounded.

“Elvis-sama and Cordelia. I brought some people with me.”

It was Nirupama, behind her was a man and woman who appeared to be as old as Elvis.

“It's been a while, Earl Pameradia and Isma-dono.”

“Oh, Duke and Duchess Owens. Thank you for coming.”

“Don't mention it. Rather, had you not invited me, then my wife would have been furious.”

The Duke smiled wryly in response to Elvis and turned his eyes to his wife. Cordelia also followed his gaze and Duchess Owens smiled.

“Nice to meet you, Cordelia-san. You're much prettier than the rumours say you are. I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart.”

“I'm a bit late, but I want to congratulate you as well. Congratulations.”

“Thank you very much.”

When Cordelia thanked them, the Duke and Duchess smiled.

However, the Duchess glanced at Nirupama straight after that.

“I told Nirupama every time I attended her tea party that I wanted to meet you, Cordelia-san. But, she always tells me that the aromas are still in the testing stage and wouldn't pass along my message.”

“Oh my, we can't let the Duchess become a tester, now can we?”

“But, aren't you using it, Nirupama? And isn't Sara also using it even though she's not related to Cordelia-san?”

Nirupama and Cordelia laughed at the Duchess who had said that childishly even though she was acting graceful.

“Say, Cordelia-san. You're planning on opening a store in the noble street, right? When is it going to open?”

“All I can say is that it depends on the preparations, but I have prepared gifts for everyone to take home. I hope you will try it if you don't mind.”

“Oh my, really?! I'm looking forward to it.”

The Duchess, who had heard Cordelia's reply, took her hand. Cordelia widened her eyes for a moment, then smiled.

However, at the same time, she heard some noise near her even though it sounded a little suppressed. That was when she realised just how much people were anticipating her products.

Then, I have to hand them goods that are beyond their expectations, Cordelia concentrated magic into her eyes and looked straight at the Duchess to see which scent would suit her.

(I'm sure the Duchess would like geranium essential oils.)

In that case, I'll make a gift set with geranium face treatment oil, lavender scented balm, and grapefruit scented aromatic bathing bombs.

Cordelia concluded and beckoned at Emina who was waiting. She took out an ornament ball with a green strap from the basket that Emina was holding. It was a bracelet with beads on it.

"If I give you your gift now then you'll have to carry it around. I'll make time to give it to you when you leave, so please hold onto this until then."

"Thanks, Cordelia-san. I'd like to talk to you a bit more, but if I monopolise you too much then others won't get the chance to talk to you. I'll invite you to a tea party next time. Please come. Your sister will be there too, so you don't have to worry."

"Thank you very much."

She didn't know how to answer when Malvina was brought up, but she was thankful for the Duchess's invitation.

(Maybe Oba-sama and Sara-sama made it easier for me to be invited to tea parties?)

However, she couldn't ask in this place in front of the Duchess, she felt like her aunt would avoid the question and say that it was a secret.

"Ah, but before we leave, your sister needs to congratulate you."

Malvina appeared from behind the Duchess after she said that.

Malvina, who resembled Isma more than Cyrus, laughed quietly.

"Congrats, Cordelia."

"Thank you very much, Onee-sama."

"I'm going to stay here tonight. Would you like to have some tea with me before I leave tomorrow?"

"Okay, I'm looking forward to it."

While accepting the unexpected offer, Cordelia was very surprised.

After speaking, Malvina left with the Duke and Duchess.

Then, Marquis Flantheim, his wife and Vernoux replaced them straight away.

"You've become really beautiful, Cordelia-san. Elvis must be extremely proud."

"Congrats, Cordelia-sama."

"Marquis Flantheim and Sara-sama. Thank you very much."

Vernoux only slightly raised his hand in greeting, but that was because he was in front of his parents. After Marquis Flantheim and his wife lightly greeted Elvis and told her that they wanted her to come to the mansion again. Then, Sara received the ornament ball from Cordelia, and they left. As they were leaving, Vernoux pointed at his own head. He was pointing at where Cordelia's hair ornament was.

『You're using it.』

She felt like he had said, so she smiled and nodded.

After that, people walked up to Cordelia without pause and she greeted a lot of people. It was the first time that she had talked to so many people at once, so she was exhausted by the time she could take a break.

“... Are you tired?”

“Otouto-sama... No, I’m fine.”

She was actually tired, but she couldn’t leave. She can only pull herself together if she looks tired. However, Elvis, who had called a nearby waiter, took a glass and gave it to Cordelia.

“Go outside for a bit. You’ll feel better with some fresh air, and your head will clear.”

“But...”

“You’ve already greeted everyone. They’re talking among themselves now, so it’s fine for you to slip out.”

Elvis declared and Cordelia couldn’t object.

It’s a special request, so I’ll gratefully accept.

“Then, I’ll do that.”

“Yeah.”

Elvis’s voice pushed her from behind as she went out. She could still hear the faint noise from the hall even though she was outside. *The garden is usually quiet, but it’s a little lively today.*

She thought as she sat on the bench to relieve the fatigue in her legs.

I can’t take a long break, but if I go back too early then Otouto-sama’s concern would be pointless. I’ll go back after relieving my fatigue with the time I have, she thought and heard footsteps slowly approach her.

It was Vernoux who came.

“So even you get tired after greeting a lot of people.”

“Since you’re saying it like that, it means that you get tired as well, right Vernoux-sama?”

“Yeah. I’m happy that they’re celebrating for me, but I can’t help but think it questionable that there is a custom of tiring oneself out on a day of celebration.”

Vernoux said as if he wanted them to give him a break, but his attitude said the opposite.

“Can I sit next to you?”

“Yes. Did you have fun today?”

“Yeah, a lot of people came so I let them talk to me. Everyone else was so engrossed in their conversations that they didn’t even notice that you had slipped out. They’re all probably in high spirits.”

“Oh my, are you saying my presence is thin?”

“If your presence is thin, then who is thick? No one thinks that they can talk to you for a second time, that’s why they’re satisfied with just talking to you once. And, you’re going to get a lot of tea party invitations.”

“Oh my, I’m looking forward to those.”

If there’s a lot of invitations, then I’ll need a certain amount of physical strength. But, if I can get a lot of information from the tea parties, then I want to show up.

“I have something serious I want to tell you. You haven’t had direct contact with Earl Clydereine’s daughter since you’ve returned to the royal capital, right?”

“Yes. I think it’s best if we don’t get involved with each other.”

“Unfortunately, it doesn’t seem like that’s what she wants. Apparently, she’s been telling people 『There’s an evil lady who thinks about wicked things』, because of her dreams.”

“Is that 『Evil lady』 me?”

“She didn’t state a name, but she said it was a girl with red eyes.”

“Isn’t that basically saying it’s me? Thank you for telling me.”

There aren’t many girls with red eyes.

Cordelia sighed since she had attacked her in a childish way.

“However, it was the right choice for you to go to Weltoria fief. Apparently, Miss Clydereine has been saying that the 『Evil lady』 has been using whatever means she could to get close to the Prince, but you’ve been away from the royal capital for two years. It doesn’t seem like she knows that, but some people have started to doubt the divine message since Countess Weltoria and Hazel-jou have been going around saying that you weren’t in the royal capital.”

“I’m really grateful to Oba-sama and Hazel-sama.”

Hazel-sama hasn’t told me this directly, but I must thank her next time I see her, Cordelia decided.

The guests of today’s evening party are the head of houses and their wives, and their heirs like Vernoux-sama. However, Hazel-sama invited me to a tea party since she couldn’t come today. She said she was looking forward to celebrating grandly.

She thought then noticed.

“You get along with Hazel-sama more than I thought you did.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Am I wrong? At least from how you were speaking about her earlier, you don’t dislike her like you did a long time ago.”

“...”

“But if you don’t want to talk about it, then I won’t ask you any more questions.”

Instead of replying in a light and casual tone, Vernoux closed his mouth and looked conflicted. Cordelia felt that he didn't have a bad impression of Hazel, but he wasn't hiding his embarrassment and he probably wouldn't say any sweet words about her.

"Well, I'm not sure what to think about how she chased after me a long time ago, but she's interacting with me like a normal lady recently. She also tried really hard for the mobile library after you left the royal capital, Dilly."

"Oh my, isn't that good?"

However, Vernoux only frowned deeper.

"But I can't get rid of the impression I left on her a long time ago. Rather than putting her guard up a little. Wouldn't she find my attitude a bit suspicious?"

"Pfft."

"What?"

"No, it's just the only lady who had you worried in the past and now has only been Hazel-sama."

"It's not funny."

It was rare to see Vernoux lose his composure, so Cordelia struggled a bit to get her laughs under control.

(It still doesn't seem like it would develop into love yet like this. Vernoux-sama isn't a straightforward person, and surprisingly, they might be a good couple.)

Cordelia didn't say this to Vernoux even as a joke since it would annoy Hazel if Vernoux got angry. At least, Cordelia was happy if they could get along as friends.

"Well, let's go back to what we were talking about. That lady's way of doing things is crude, but her tenacity is first-rate. Fortunately, she didn't show up in public much until she reached adulthood, so there's still a lot of people who don't know what she looks like."

Cordelia tilted her head at Vernoux's way of speaking.

"Vernoux-sama, have you talked to her directly somewhere before?"

"I went to Miss Clydereine's coming of age ceremony. Well, I went to greet her and spy."

"Oh my, I haven't heard this before."

"It wasn't something I had to tell you straight away, and I didn't think the servants should hear about this, so I thought today would be a good time to tell you. However, I've told you all I know, all I know is that she really is mysterious and magical like the rumours overly praise her as. I, myself, have been asked by the Earl to act as a mediator between him and His Highness."

Vernoux wrinkled his eyebrows after saying that.

"I don't want to say this but be careful of harassment. From Miss Clydereine as well as the ladies who are trying to suck up to her."

“I understand. I am prepared to some extent. I knew she loathed me when she declared war on me two years ago.”

“Well, the ladies who are trying to suck up to her just want to snuggle up to her power and influence. I don’t think they would make the Pameradia House their enemies, and that lady won’t make any flashy moves unless she has positive proof that she can win against you. Well, I’m sure you can guess this, Dilly.”

“Yes.”

“But, a really amazing person has set their eyes on you.”

Cordelia could only smile at those words.

(But surrounding herself with people and gossiping... sounds just like something 『Cordelia』 would do.)

Shelley is said to be the second coming of the saint and uses the 『Dreamer Power』. She acts on her dreams. But I read in the Big Bookcase that the original Saint, who also made prophecies using her dream powers, started using her powers for herself, and as a result, made prophecies that never came true. Shelley must have begun using her powers for herself that’s why she’s saying delusional things which differ from reality, but it’s not unbearable if she dreams the wrong things.

“I can’t say that she won’t find proof. But, regarding her delusion about me deceiving His Highness, she probably won’t believe me if I say, 『I’m not trying to get close to His Highness』.”

“Yeah. But if you don’t sort this out as soon as possible, even the people who don’t think well of Miss Clydereine will start thinking that you’re a worrisome lady since you’re involved with an annoying lady.”

“It’s true that something troublesome would happen if we were to meet face-to-face.”

“Sorry for talking about this on an auspicious occasion.”

“Why are you apologising, Vernoux-sama? You’re telling me this because you’re worried about me, right?”

“But, it’s a depressing conversation, isn’t it?”

Vernoux shrugged and Cordelia laughed a little.

“Somehow, it’s strange. I can’t believe there would come a day when I hear these words out of your mouth since you used to only come here to eat cake.”

“That’s what I thought too. I really wished that my father would stop taking me everywhere, but I’m glad he brought me here. I was able to make a good childhood friend thanks to that.”

Cordelia opened her eyes wide when she heard those words. Vernoux didn’t tease her and he looked calm and relaxed.

“This is rare.”

“It’s because it’s a day of celebration. I won’t say this after today.”

“That’s a shame. But I also think I’m lucky to have met you. The time I spent with you and Gille-sama was very fun and I treasure them.”

I’m delighted to meet a friend who I can talk to without reservation.

However, Vernoux also looked surprised like Cordelia had earlier.

“Hearing you say that doesn’t sound like you at all.”

“You said something similar, didn’t you Vernoux-sama?”

“It’s alright for me since I’m only saying them today.”

“Then, I’ll also only say these words today as well.”

“I see. So it’s just for today?”

Vernoux smiled.

“What’s wrong?”

“No, I just thought it would be better if you told that to Gille too. It’s sad that he’s being left out.”

Like Vernoux-sama had said, there’s no reason for me not to tell Gille-sama, but I feel like the meaning would be different if I wrote it in a letter and gave it to Vernoux-sama to pass it to him. But I don’t know when I will see Gille-sama again.

“Well, I won’t force you to. It’s his fault for not being here.”

“Yes. If the conversation flows towards this the next time, I see him then I might tell him... but I can’t write it in a letter. I’ll put it off for now.”

“Well, it might be embarrassing later if you write it in a letter.”

“I don’t think it’s something to be embarrassed about?”

“Really?”

Cordelia was amazed since Vernoux had said it as if her black history was confirmed.

“But I think that important things should be told directly.”

“Then tell him directly. Well, I’m more concerned about that lady more than this right now. Even if she sees dreams that come true, a person who doesn’t notice the contradictions between reality and dreams becomes a burden. I don’t think she would ever be fit to be queen in the future.”

“I have nothing to do with the fight she wants to have. But, I’m relieved to know that Vernoux-sama and Clive-sama are by His Highness’s side since you two think that way.”

“Even if we’re not there, His Highness isn’t blind.”

Vernoux lightly poked Cordelia’s head as he stood up after saying that.

“Don’t lose. Use everything you can. Me, Clay and Miss Hazel will be happy to help you. And it seems like you’ve gained a much stronger hand today.”

“Thank you very much. But do you think I’m going to lose?”

“I don’t want to think of my childhood friend as being that weak.”

“Weak, you say... Even though I look like this, I’m a weak lady.”

“I’m praising you for having a firm heart... Or so I thought, but what about you is weak? A weak lady wouldn’t go horse riding or sneak out, would they?”

Then, they looked at each other and burst into laughter at nearly the same time.

“I should go back soon. Since, I’m the star of the night.”

“I see. The Earl will glare at me if we go back together, so I’ll stay out here for a bit longer.”

“Okay. You might not be able to see the flowers since it’s dark, but they smell nice so please enjoy it.”

However, Cordelia didn’t recall a time when Vernoux had even admired the flowers at her mansion whenever he came over.

At that time, a soft but strong wind blew into the area.

However, that wind only lasted for a moment, and then she heard a rustling sound.

“...”

“What’s wrong?”

“No... This might be strange to ask... But is Gille-sama here?”

There was nothing strange around her. The garden looked as it always did at night. Still, she felt that the aura was different from normal.

“As expected of you. You can’t see him, and he has no presence, but you can tell?”

“So, he is here?”

It was a little different from the thin presence she had felt at the Hale Mansion when she was 12.

At that time, Gille had used a mask to block other people’s recognition of him, but the presence right now was less than that.

Even if she knew that someone was here, she couldn’t feel their presence.

(Maybe he’s using a mask I’m not familiar with that’s why I can’t feel him... I honestly can’t feel his presence.)

If he’s here, then did he come here to celebrate my coming of age?

Cordelia waited for Gille to show himself, but he didn’t.

“What’s wrong?”

She asked curiously but received no reply.

Instead, Vernoux spoke.

“Gille can’t show his face today. He came to see me not you.”

“To see you?”

It might have been unavoidable that a suspicious expression appeared on her face.

Vernoux looked amazed. Then, he walked a few steps and stopped. He put out his right hand and a piece of paper appeared from thin air.

(He really is here...!)

“He said to give this to you.”

She looked at the paper and saw that it was an unsigned birthday card, but she knew it was from Gille because of the familiar handwriting.

“Did he come to deliver this?”

“Yeah, I was asked by Gille too, but people will misunderstand if I gave it to you in front of people. Then, he came himself. He said that he was going to leave it near the gate so that someone can see it. He thought that they would bring it to you since it’s not in an envelope and they would be able to tell that it’s not dangerous. But he came in because he thought you would be here.”

“Then, can he show himself? No one is around.”

“Well, give him a break. It’s also for your sake that he’s doing this.”

“My sake?”

“If Gille’s parents found out that he was here, then they would want him to marry you, gah. Hey, don’t hit me suddenly.”

“... Vernoux-sama, it’s only obvious that you would get hit. Even as a joke, please improve your sense of humour.”

She wondered what he would say, but it wasn’t anything decent.

She regretted listening to him seriously and sighed.

(But it’s certainly unnatural for him to be here unless he’s the oldest son.)

Like how Hazel-sama isn’t here, Gille-sama might be in a position where he can’t come here with his real appearance. Nevertheless, there will be needless rumours going around if someone were to see him here.

Vernoux and Gille were talking about something while Cordelia was thinking, but when she looked at them, it looked as if Vernoux was acting in a one-man play and it was funny.

“Well, isn’t it like that?”

“Alright, alright, I got it, I got it. My bad.”

“Ah, whatever. I’ll listen to you next time so let me off for today. You, go home.”

Vernoux flicked his hand as if he was chasing away a dog, and Cordelia finally burst out laughing.

“You know, Dilly. You come calm him down too.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what expression Gille-sama has on his face right now.”

“Even I can’t see his face... Argh, Gille show yourself already.”

“Please don’t force him. It’s your fault for saying something strange after all.”

“No, it’s because Gille decided to come here.”

However, Cordelia decided to ignore Vernoux since she probably wouldn’t be able to agree with him even if she heard what he said.

Instead, she bowed towards Gille who she couldn’t see.

“Thank you very much. Does the hair ornament look good on me?”

She couldn’t hear a reply, but she felt like the air got softer.

“Now then, I really must get back.”

“Yeah. Well, I’ll also warn Gille about his trespassing.”

Cordelia smiled wryly at Vernoux, bowed, then went back into the hall.

It’s disappointing that I couldn’t see my friend after two years, but he doesn’t seem to have changed at all.

She felt this from his invisible exchange with Vernoux and became a little happy.

Intermission: Meddling with Sworn Brother

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Vernoux's Perspective

Gille stared at me until Dilly returned to the venue, and I deliberately sighed.

I don't think he would be exposed at a time like this, but when it comes to this Prince, he has a bad habit of going incognito, but he is still a good-for-nothing guy.

"Hey. I told you to come as 『Sylvester』 if you come, right?"

In a way, I wanted him to get close to Dilly as 『Sylvester』, that's why I didn't use my magic to change him into 『Gille』.

I told Dilly that I was going to stop delivering their letters for them, but I think he should make progress or give up if he can't.

But, even if I think like this, he has a strange hobby... no, the black-haired Prince, who likes to collect mysterious masks, turned away from me with the mask still on his face. This guy is probably the most secretive person in this kingdom.

It seemed like he hadn't forgotten what I had told him, and it was like Gille to come as 『Sylvester』, but his attitude shocked me a lot.

"The gatekeeper has to let you pass, so you should have snuck in as 『Sylvester』 instead of 『Gille』. Tonight is just for exchanging greetings. You already know Dilly, and she's the daughter of your honoured teacher. You could have snuck in and just greeted her before going back home."

"I can't, I wasn't invited. I thought it might make a bad impression on the Earl."

"Yeah..."

It's not like I can't understand that.

"I gave the Earl my congratulations yesterday. But he didn't even invite me out of politeness."

"Did you think that Earl would do that?"

"No, but I was going to go if he invited me. But I'm glad he hadn't invited me."

"Why?"

I wonder if he will say that he's not ready yet.

"If I were to come, then I would take the limelight away from Dilly. She's the main star today. I shouldn't get in the way of that."

"I'm praying that that isn't an excuse from you being a good-for-nothing."

He had talked in a calm voice, so I didn't retort much.

Well, I'll let him off for today. His timing for appearing as 『Sylvester』 has already been lost.

However, Gille didn't change the topic even though this was the best opportunity to do so.

“Vernoux, you're so relentless.”

“I'm kind enough, aren't I? I even held myself back and didn't say that you could have danced with Dilly if you had gotten engaged with her.”

“Didn't you just say it now?”

“You're the one who made me say it.”

I said and Gille shrugged.

“It's not like I hate it, and I'm thankful to hear it. Vernoux, I think of you like a real brother.”

“You're saying that now? You don't have to thank me or anything, just move forward.”

“Yes, I'll get close to her properly. But with the current pattern, she'll probably run away from me.”

It was rare to see him being optimistic, so I looked straight at him.

I can't see his face because of the mask, but he wasn't just saying that.

He always looked worried, but he didn't look like that now.

“What's with you today? You're really bold right now.”

“Do I look a little cool?”

“If you didn't have a mask on... hey stop joking around.”

I thought he was acting a bit weirdly, then he turned around and had his back towards me.

“It would also help dispel that rumour if I show everyone how much Dilly wants to avoid me. I won't hold back if it's for Dilly.”

“That's really positive thinking. But, that's only if she avoids you.”

“Well, at first. But I think it would be great if she gradually came to accept me. I'm also a little jealous right now and I thought about doing something like that.”

“What? Jealous?”

I scowled, then Gille turned around and pointed at me.

“You're jealous of me?”

“Yes. I've always been jealous of you, but when I saw you two talking, I wanted Dilly to tell me that she was glad to have met me too.”

“You heard all that? It's distasteful to eavesdrop.”

But it's good that it ignited him.

I enjoyed watching over the two of them, but the time limit is approaching.

“Good luck. Not only you, but Dilly has also received a lot of marriage proposals. Having said that, I don’t think things would progress too quickly since the Earl loves his daughter. You’re more likely to meet other girls first.”

“I know.”

“But you’ve done a great job making it to adulthood without a fiancée.”

People have been looking for a fiancée for Gille since we were young.

The most conspicuous method were the tea parties aimed at children that the Queen hosted. Well, Gille would have been happy if Dilly attended one of them and a lot of things could have progressed.

The frequency of those tea parties decreased as we got older, but they were still held once every season, however when did those stop?

“... Actually, mother found out.”

“Excuse me?”

“Well, she hasn’t found out about Dilly. But she knows that I have been exchanging letters with a lady. I think she found out when I was 12. She noticed that I was choosing stationery to send to Dilly.”

Is it something that can be found out with something that trivial?

A mother’s observational skills might be sharper than I thought.

“Fortunately, she didn’t tell father.”

“Is that fortunate?”

“I wouldn’t want him to tease me. I thought you would understand, Vernoux.”

“... Ah, yeah.”

I don’t think my father would tease me. However, he would do something much worse than that.

It’s not difficult to imagine that if my father heard any love rumours about me, then he would gleefully ask me about it in detail. I can even predict that he would get heated talking about how he met my mother again.

I don’t think His Majesty would get that heated up, but Gille and I might feel the same level of discomfort.

But whatever the reason, it’s great that he’s decided to interact with Dilly as 『Sylvester』.

But there is something that is troubling me.

Gille used the word ‘jealous’. In other words, he isn’t composed.

There... How is he... or rather, how will he let her know that 『Gille』 and 『Sylvester』 are the same person? Isn’t he completely forgetting about this?

He's always open but when it comes to Dilly, he becomes like this.

"But you've committed yourself, right?"

"Huh?"

"I'm talking to myself."

But well, there's something I have to tell him first.

"Just don't take risks."

"Huh?"

"Don't risk it to gain happiness. Don't think about giving something a try just because you have nothing to lose."

I can imagine what expression he was making underneath that mask when I saw him stop moving at my words.

"Keep it together younger brother."

"Eh, I'm the younger one?"

"You want to be the older brother?"

"Because you have bad manners."

"I won't call someone, who got found out, an older brother. Never."

Well, even if I have to compromise, I would probably say we were twins, but there's no point in arguing about it.

"Oh yes, I want to confirm this just in case, but you haven't met Miss Clydereine yet, have you?"

"No, I have."

"Isee... Wait, what?! When?"

"Yesterday. I ran into her when she went to deliver something that Earl Clydereine had forgotten. I met her when I was on my way to my lesson with Earl Pameradia. She was with Earl Clydereine."

"Weren't they ambushing you then?"

The place that Gille uses for his lessons with Earl Pameradia isn't off-limits to other people, but it's not a place where people will go. But Earl Clydereine must have wanted to introduce Miss Clydereine to Gille since she wasn't alone. It wouldn't be odd for the Earl to know Gille's itinerary.

Well, since she's called the 『Dreamer Girl』, she might have known he would be there from her power.

I wasn't the only one who thought this, Gille, who was smiling wryly, also thought the same.

"So, what was your impression of her?"

“She’s a very cute girl. She speaks politely and her voice is nice too. I was a little surprised since she wasn’t like what the rumours say.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. If she only talks, then I could still call her a normal lady. She didn’t talk about her dreams either.”

I knitted my eyebrows at those words.

I’ve met her a few times, and I got the impression that she was a scheming girl. Did she make herself that presentable in front of Gille?

“But I felt a little strange talking to her.”

“What do you mean?”

“We didn’t talk for that long, but she had her eyes wide open even when I was reacting in a normal way, so it surprised me. And, I also received replies as if she had heard me say something completely different.”

“Rather that strange... it’s really weird. Are you sure you want to put her in the category of people who you can talk with normally?”

Gille only laughed at my question and didn’t confirm or deny it.

However, what on earth is she thinking, that lady?

I’ll probably meet her some day at some evening party, so I probably should greet her next time and try to find out what’s in her mind.

Otherwise, I wouldn’t even be able to help these childhood friends of mine when they’re in trouble.

Act 56: Advice is Sudden

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

The evening party ended in great success.

Cordelia was relieved that all the guests had left the Pameradia House with smiles on their faces because of the gifts. Then, she quickly went to bed after she cleaned up.

She was more tired from the party than she thought she would be, and it didn't take her long to fall asleep.

Still, she woke up somewhat earlier than she usually did.

She didn't feel as tired as the previous night, but her body still felt sluggish. However, she was wide awake because she was still nervous.

(I'm having a tea party with Onee-sama today... I must be careful not to let out a yawn.)

She wasn't on bad or good terms with Malvina. Just like with Cyrus and Isma a long time ago, she wasn't involved with Malvina. Malvina, unlike her brothers, had gotten married early and she didn't come home, so Cordelia didn't have the chance to get along with her. Therefore, she didn't know her personality well either.

(I might be able to get along with Onee-sama if I talk with her like I did with my Onii-samas, but we'll probably only talk about gossip since we're only having tea together.)

Even if she's a quiet person, she probably won't run out of things to talk about. I'm grateful for this opportunity since I can get to know what kind of person Onee-sama is.

(But it's strange if I think about it. Onee-sama acted on behalf of Okaa-sama until she got married, but she never came back home after she married.)

Yesterday when she had spoken to Malvina, Cordelia felt that she had a gentle aura. *Onee-sama is the one who invited me to drink tea with her in the first place, so I probably don't have to be on my guard.* She thought, and prepared tea straight after she had a light breakfast.

Cordelia chose the greenhouse for the tea party. It was a building which hadn't been built when Malvina married, so she was sure that Malvina would enjoy it.

Then, after the preparations were done, Cordelia guided Malvina through the brightly lit greenhouse.

Malvina entered the greenhouse and sat down, then she looked a little troubled when she saw Emina, who was serving as their waitress, but immediately smiled nostalgically.

"It's been a while, Emina. Even though I invited you to work here, I still can't get over the guilt."

"What are you saying, Malvina-sama? As I have said a long time ago, I am happy. I am being paid a lot more than if I had worked at the market."

“Oh my, so you’re able to say things like that now?”



Cordelia looked at the two who were smiling and recalled that Malvina was the person who had recommended that Emina work at the Pameradia House. They got on better than she thought they would.

The two didn't speak anymore than that, and Emina smiled and bowed before leaving the greenhouse.

"It seems like Emina is worried that I wouldn't be able to talk to you if she was here."

Malvina picked up the cup and put it on her mouth.

"Onee-sama. Thank you again for coming even though you're busy."

"You don't have to worry that much. I came to congratulate you and say thank you."

"Thank you?"

Cordelia tilted her head and Malvina smiled wryly.

"I want to thank you because of Otou-sama."

"Because of Otou-sama?"

"That's right. Otou-sama, the reason why I didn't come home at all after I married."

Cordelia blinked at Malvina's words, but Malvina continued.

"I knew that I should have watched over you as long as Okaa-sama doesn't show up in public. But, the Otou-sama whom I know was a man who treated others like chess pieces, and he didn't care about what methods he had to use. So, I decided not to come home anymore because I thought that he might use the Owens family if I had. That was me rebelling against him."

"..."

"If you think about the timing, then you were born to be married off into the royal family."

(... I know.)

Certainly, if Onee-sama's marriage was a political marriage, then there's a high chance that Otou-sama would have involved them in his plans. And, if it was Otou-sama back in the days, then both families would incur unnecessary enmity. No, if I recall what was said when she married, then it would definitely become like that.

"However, it was surprising that I fell in love with my arranged husband. But, that's only a hindsight-based opinion."

She didn't know how her sister's marriage was, but she knew Elvis's character. Rather, if Elvis wasn't like that, then she wouldn't have been born.

Elvis's attitude softened after Cordelia was four, but Malvina was 18 at that time. Even if his attitude had softened, it was only towards Cordelia, and Malvina's impression of him didn't change before her marriage at 19.

But it didn't seem like Malvina had a grudge against Elvis. Rather, her expression seemed really calm.

“I did wrong by you.”

“No. It’s not something you have to apologise for, Onee-sama. And, Otou-sama spoils me a lot.”

“It does really seem like he does. I was surprised that Otou-sama has become so human. I had heard from Isma that he had mellowed out thanks to you, but I thought he was just saying that.”

“I didn’t do such a significant thing.”

Cordelia said, then smiled wryly.

She honestly didn’t remember doing that much. The remark which caused Elvis to spoil her was also said so that she could avoid her crisis. Other than that, she hadn’t done anything special.

If she had to say it, then there was the incident with her grandmother and Elvis’s real mother, Fulvia, but she had only created the opportunity for them to meet from the coincidences that piled up. But she couldn’t tell that to Malvina.

“I know that people can change, but I thought that only Otou-sama wouldn’t. I’m still a child too.

“Please don’t say that. If Onee-sama is still a child, then I, who had my coming of age yesterday, is still a baby.”

“Oh my, if it’s like that then my congratulations would be pointless.”

Malvina laughed lightly and Cordelia also smiled.

“I have something to give to you. It’s from Okaa-sama.”

“Okaa-sama got me a present?”

“Yes. Okaa-sama told me to give this to the child I think would suit it best. Given the timing, I’m sure she wanted to give this to you.”

It was a bracelet with a tiny flower on it.

The bracelet, made from a few thin chains, was decorated with pearls and what looked like garnets, gave a neat impression.

“Thank you very much. I’m astonished.”

Cordelia was happy that her mother had prepared the invitation, but she couldn’t help but open her eyes wide in surprise at the fact that her mother had prepared a gift for her.

“Okaa-sama can’t be honest, so if you thank her directly for the gift, she might insist that she didn’t want to give it to you. So, use it where she can see instead of saying thanks to her.”

“Okay, I’ll happily do so.”

“I think you suit warm colours like red and orange, but Okaa-sama chose a white flower for you. But it looks good on you.”

Cordelia thought it was because the flowers that she sent to her mother were always white.

Her mother probably attached a red gem to the bracelet because it matched Cordelia’s eyes.

(In fact, red dresses look best on me.)

Cordelia knew this, thus she liked wearing red accessories. Her favourite colour was red, but she wanted to avoid wearing red dresses at all cost.

(Because it's the colour that the game 『Cordelia』 always wore...!)

Even if I know it would look good on me, but since I associate red dresses with the bullish, arrogant and domineering 『Cordelia』, I'm hesitant to wear them.

She thought while fastening the bracelet around her left wrist straight away.

“It suits you well.”

“Thank you very much.”

“The expressions of the servants in this mansion have also become very bright. Also, Isma has always been civil since he was little, but he's the type who hides their true intentions and puts up a front. Now I feel like he can truly speak gently. Onii-sama still doesn't talk much, but he cares about sister-in-law more than he used to... or is this because they're newlyweds?”

Malvina said while laughing strangely.

“But I'm sure it's because of you. You should come and see me next time. I'd like to talk with you slowly, and your niece and nephew are cute.”

“Yes, I will.”

She knew that she had a niece and nephew, but she has never met them before.

I think the oldest is nine now. I'm sure Onee-sama's children are very cute, she thought and was surprised.

“What's wrong?”

“No, hmm... I realised that my niece and I are actually closer in age than we are, Onee-sama.”

“You're right. I'm sure my child would be happy that she finally has someone who is like an elder sister... But you don't look like that's what you're surprised about. You're already 16, you're also worried about your marriage, right?”

“Eh, yes. However, I haven't heard anything about my engagement at all, so I can't imagine it.”

Even if I know it'll be soon, I can't imagine it at all. I didn't think too deeply about it since I'm sure I would understand when the time comes... or rather, there's also the fact that my cheeks flush the more I think about it so I didn't, but Onee-sama, who is in front of me, got married at 19. I only have three years before I turn 19.

The marriage age of nobles in this kingdom is wide, and it's not especially surprising even if one, regardless of gender, gets married right before they turn of age or if they get married in their late 20s. Therefore, I know I don't have to rush, but a lot of people do get married early, so it's impossible to ignore it.

“Actually, I invited you to have tea with me because I really wanted to talk about that.”

“Excuse me?”

“I don’t think you would be introduced to a fiancé suddenly, unlike me. But I don’t think you would have the chance to meet someone either. So why don’t you go out yourself and search for your own husband.”

“What does that mean?”

Judging from how Elvis was acting, Cordelia could somewhat guess that she wouldn’t be introduced to a fiancé all of a sudden. However, it was hard to think that proposals didn’t come at all since she was from a prestigious Earl House.

But Malvina’s eyes said that she wasn’t joking, and she looked rather serious and troubled.

“Hans secretly told me this... It appears that Otou-sama doesn’t think that the men around here suit you, so he has been refusing all your marriage proposals. I can honestly understand that he adores you a lot, but...”

“Huh?”

“And, it’s not just Otou-sama, even Nirupama-obasama is carefully investigating the men... Honestly, they’re troublesome guardians.”

What she said was too shocking to Cordelia.

“Hmm, how does Otou-sama refuse...?”

“『It’s still too early for my daughter, maybe someday...』, he would say.”

“I’ve never heard about this!”

“Yes, it looks like he’s being careful not to let you notice.”

Cordelia was astonished at Malvina, who was smiling wryly.

Sure, it was me who plotted so that I wouldn’t have to marry into the royal family without my permission, but for him to love me so much that he won’t even allow for other marriage proposals...

Cordelia involuntarily looked up at the ceiling since Earl Pameradia and Countess Weltoria were too strong of an iron wall.

“Oh my, you don’t have to look that disappointed. If he won’t talk to you about it, then you can go look for one yourself. You’ve received a lot of evening party invitations, and he won’t go as far as banning you from going to those, now would he?”

“That’s... true.”

“Even if you fall in love with an heir and get married to him, you don’t have to worry about succeeding the Weltoria House. If it comes down to it then my daughter will head to Oba-sama’s House. She’s strong and clever, so I can recommend her even without my bias as her parent.”

Evening parties are places to collect information, so I shouldn’t be prohibited from attending them.

I could think about my partner after I decide on my future, but in my case, I can also choose someone who I love.

“But after talking to you, I thought it would be alright if they don’t talk about your marriage proposals. Somehow, I feel like you’ll have a grand love.”

“Gr-grand love...?”

“Yes. A grand love that seems like it would be turned into a play or musical.”

She stared at the smiling Malvina and recalled that the romance novels in the library were Malvina’s favourite. Cordelia smiled wryly at Malvina’s hopeful look.

“I’d be happier if I could meet someone who I can spend my life peacefully with rather than have a grand love.”

“Oh my. I wonder if Otou-sama and Oba-sama would approve of such a calm person?”

“I would wholeheartedly ask them to.”

“I see. I don’t think Otou-sama and Oba-sama would refuse to accept the marriage if their beloved child is asking them so earnestly even if their personalities are like that... it’s impossible to tell.”

Malvina had agreed with her vigorously in the beginning, but she averted her eyes in the end.

“Onee-sama, thank you for the valuable information.”

“It’s nothing. I thought the conversation would have gone different if you weren’t interested in getting married, but I’m glad I wasn’t meddling.”

“It’s a very important conversation for me.”

“Hehe. But I’m looking forward to it. I really love romantic novels. I don’t mind if you come to me for advice. Oh, isn’t Marquis Flantheim’s son your age?”

“Unfortunately, I definitely won’t get married to Vernoux-sama.”

“Hmm, that’s too bad.”

Malvina didn’t look disappointed at all, and she stared at Cordelia as if she was watching a love story.

“Oh yes, then how about Prince Sylvester? I definitely don’t think Otou-sama would say no to him.”

“Please don’t joke.”

It would probably be difficult for Otou-sama to refuse, but I’ve been trying my hardest to avoid that.

“But romance novels also involve fighting between women. Even so, do your best.”

“I want a peaceful relationship, so if possible, could you also pray that I have one too, Onee-sama?”

“Well, that’s usually the case. But I think hardships deepen bonds. At least, the bits that people can see from an outsider’s perspective.”

Malvina said jokingly and Cordelia smiled wryly.

“It’s like you said, Onee-sama. So, I will be excited to hear about your hardships, conflicts and romance you experience as you got along with your husband while rebelling against Otou-sama.”

Cordelia said and her sister’s smile changed.

“That’s a bit of a secret.”

Cordelia stared at Malvina whose ears were going red as she tried to maintain a smile on her face and laughed a little.

She couldn’t tell if rumours about Shelley had reached Malvina with how she was acting.

As for Cordelia, she thought that it couldn’t be helped that she wanted to experience a peaceful love without any carnage.

Act 57: A Fun Exchange with the Ladies

A few days after Cordelia's coming of age banquet on a sunny afternoon.

A cheerful voice echoed through the Hale mansion.

"Cordelia-sama, congratulations on becoming an adult."

"I heard from my parents that it was a very glamorous party. I'm disappointed that I couldn't attend."

"Thank you very much, Hazel-sama and Dahlia-sama."

The sisters, Hazel and Dahlia, congratulated Cordelia and she smiled.

Today, she came to the Hale mansion because they had both invited her here. There were a lot of sweets on the table that were made from citrus fruits.

Cordelia held out small wooden boxes to the two while looking forward to eating the sweets.

"This is a gift. I thought about bringing what I had given out at the evening party, but this is better."

"Oh my, thank you very much! May I look inside?"

"Of course."

The small boxes were made of the Pameradia fief's special wood and the inside was a jewellery box made of velvet.

Cordelia placed round pendants with delicate edge engravings in those boxes.

When the Hale sisters looked inside, they raised their voices in surprise.

"It's a very cute pendant!"

"Thank you very much, Cordelia-sama!"

"The pendant is hollow inside. You turn the top and the lid will come off, so you can put a cloth soaked in essential oils inside. That way, you'll be able to enjoy the scent all day."

"Thank you very much, Cordelia-sama. I'll take good care of it."

"The engraving is beautiful too. It's fun just to look at it and it won't make me bored."

Cordelia was relieved since Hazel was holding the pendant preciousy and Dahlia was eyeing the box. It was nice to see that they liked the pendant that she had put a lot of thought in.

"Come to think of it, Cordelia-sama danced with Isma-sama at the evening party, right? I heard that you two danced like you were in a painting and it was eye-candy for a lot of ladies."

"I feel like they think Onii-sama is the eye-candy and not me."

"That's not true! The scene was more radiating because it was you two!!"

Cordelia smiled wryly at Dahlia's reassuring words. She had certainly worked on her beauty since she was little, but it was a little embarrassing to be praised like that to her face.

Dahlia saw her expression and sighed.

“I’d like to work as Isma-sama’s subordinate someday. I still remember Cordelia-sama and Isma-sama showing me your family’s treasured items at the Pameradia House as if it was yesterday. I also want to be a knight who people can talk to someday.”

Cordelia heard from Hazel that when she invited Dahlia to her house two years ago, it had a very positive impact on her studies. However, Hazel also didn’t smile at Dahlia. Rather, her eyes were slightly raised.

“It’s good for you to admire knights, but you still say you don’t have time and then jump off the railing of the stairs. You still have a long way to go until you obtain the mannerisms of a lady.”

“Oh my, Onee-sama. If I don’t relax somewhat at home, then it would feel smothering. It’s alright if I act properly outside, and it’s also exercise.”

“Honestly... If you let your guard down, then you’ll act like yourself outside too.”

However, she wasn’t as strongly opposed to this like she used to be, and for better or for worse, Dahlia ignored Hazel’s small comment.

“Dahlia-sama, it’s nearly time for the employment exams, isn’t it?”

“Yes. It’s complicated since I’m nervous and want to be accepted as soon as possible.”

“I hope that you can take it with a calm mind.”

“Yes, thank you very much!”

Dahlia grabbed both her hands and replied energetically. Cordelia looked forward to hearing the results since Dahlia was really hyped up.

“Oh yes, your Onee-sama also attended the evening party, didn’t she Cordelia-sama? I heard that she’s a really beautiful person.”

“Yes. Onee-sama got married when I was young, so I was nervous to talk to her after so long, but we had tea together and were able to speak frankly in no time at all.”

The Hale sisters looked happy when they heard this. *Is it because they get along well?*

“Actually, she told me something that greatly surprised me.”

“What did she say?”

Dahlia tilted her head when she heard what Cordelia had said, but Hazel put her hand to her mouth and said in a cheerful voice.

“No way, did she talk about your engagement?”

“Y-yes... Huh?! Really, Cordelia-sama?!”

Dahlia wasn’t familiar with this topic and her face turned red, but she also looked curious. Cordelia lightly shook her head.

“Unfortunately, it’s the opposite. Onee-sama told me that Otou-sama has been refusing all marriage proposals that have been sent to me without me knowing. I’ve never even heard about this before.”

Both the Hale sisters looked as if they had been caught off guard, but then they strangely burst out into laughter.

“Oh my, I heard that you get along with your Otou-sama, but he cherishes you that much.”

“It’s not funny, Hazel-sama.”

“But, it’s so pleasant.”

“Argh, you’re acting like that too, Dahlia-sama? Even Oba-sama is on the same page as Otou-sama, so it’s really tough.”

Of course, she won’t hate Elvis for something like this, and she had expected Hazel and Dahlia to laugh, but she also wanted to complain a little.

“Onee-sama said that it would be difficult for me to get married unless I find my destined man myself and persuade Otou-sama to let me marry him.”

“Then, you’ll have to go out to more places after this. I’m rooting for you.”

Cordelia smiled and nodded at Dahlia’s words.

“Yes, that’s the plan.”

Marquis Flantheim said a long time ago that one wouldn’t be able to find a good partner if they don’t have many encounters. He took Vernoux to various houses when he was younger, and Cordelia could feel the importance of that sentence now.

However, Hazel tilted her head.

“But, don’t you have 『Letter-kun』, Cordelia-sama? Are you two not in contact anymore? Was his name Gille-sama?”

“Ha-Hazel-sama...!”

“Letter-kun? Cordelia-sama, what is this about?”

Cordelia had talked about this in the past, but it was only when she had first met Hazel. Cordelia winced a little since Hazel remembered his name even though they probably didn’t have any mutual acquaintances.

“Gille-sama is a good friend, but I haven’t seen him at all since I’ve returned to the royal capital. He seems very busy.”

She had met him at the evening party, but she hadn’t seen his face. However, if she had to explain that in detail then the fact that she didn’t know Gille’s real name would pop up, so she was hesitant to talk about it.

(I don’t really care about who Gille-sama is though.)

But if I think of Gille-sama as a person of the opposite sex like Hazel-sama said, then it would become strange. I have never thought of him as a target even though we've been exchanging letters for many years, but if I think about it, if we continue to write letters to each other, then that's possible ——.

(Wait, that has nothing to do with it...!!)

I've never thought that about Vernoux-sama even though I know his lineage and he's a childhood friend like Gille-sama is. I'm sure Gille-sama doesn't think that way ——.

She thought, and suddenly looked to the front at Hazel who was trembling.

“Ha... Hazel-sama?”

“That... won't do! I can't believe Gille-sama won't meet you even though you haven't been back in the royal capital for so long...! If he likes you then he definitely won't act that way!”

“H-hmm... Hazel-sama!”

Hazel stood up and walked up to Cordelia, then she grabbed Cordelia's hands.



“Cordelia-sama! Let’s go to a lot of places so you can meet a lot of wonderful gentlemen!”

“Ah, y-yes...”

“Don’t worry, Cordelia-sama! I can say that you will have a happy marriage! If it’s the kind of man who will make you sad, then I’ll beat him up!”

“H-hm... Please calm down, Hazel-sama!”

I haven’t thought that far into the future ——— Cordelia panicked and lightly coughed.

“Umm, Hazel-sama. If I can get married, then I’ll like to give back the happiness I’ve been given to my partner, or maybe even more.”

After saying that, she noticed that what she had said had nothing to do with what they were talking about.

(I panicked too much! I was supposed to say, [I wouldn’t get married to someone like that] !)

However, it seemed like Cordelia’s thoughts had nothing to do with Hazel at all.

“That’s wonderful, Cordelia-sama! So, you think of building a happy home together, after all!”

“Onee-sama. You’ve been going wild by yourself since a while ago, so Cordelia-sama is troubled.”

“Geez, you’re too indifferent Dahlia! You never listen to conversations like this!”

Hazel returned to her seat after Dahlia had spoken. Cordelia thanked Dahlia for her timing.

“Oh yes, Dahlia. Is it nearly time for your lesson?”

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry about this even though I invited you here, Cordelia-sama. I have to study soon so please excuse me. Have fun with Onee-sama.”

“Don’t worry about it. Good luck with your lesson. Thank you for spending time with me.”

“Please take your time. Then, please excuse me.”

As she watched Dahlia leave, Hazel smiled apologetically at Cordelia.

“Dahlia said she wanted to spend more time with you, but the exam is around the corner, so her tutor has been giving her a lot of lessons.”

“I’m delighted that she invited me here even though she’s so busy.”

“I appreciate that you said that as her sister. All these sweets were chosen by Dahlia. Please have a lot. Would you like another cup of tea?”

“Yes, please.”

Then, the maid, who Hazel had called over, poured them more tea before backing away again and Hazel had a slightly serious expression on her face.

“What’s wrong?”

“Cordelia-sama, this is an abrupt question... But you’ll be opening a fragrance store in the noble district, right?”

“Yes. I plan to open it within the first 10 days of next month.”

“That’s what I want to talk to you about... If possible, there’s someone who I want you to meet so that you can decide if they can work at that shop or not. If possible, they want to work at the back.”

“Do you mean as an employee?”

“Of course, you can refuse if they think they’re inadequate. But I was just wondering if you would give them a chance.”

Cordelia tilted her head at Hazel, who asked this even though she said it was alright to refuse.

“What is the person like?”

“It’s Kaylie-sama, Viscount Fiennes’s daughter. After Cordelia-sama left the royal capital, she started helping with the mobile library for a year now. She’s smart and she does paperwork quickly and accurately.”

Cordelia was surprised to hear the name of a noble lady since she thought that one of the servants in the Hale House had wanted to change occupations.

“Speaking of Viscount Fiennes... Didn’t they receive a lot of damage in their fief from the flood last year?”

“Yes. A few years ago, they offered the citizens, who had lost a lot of crops to disease, tax exemptions and special benefits, so their financial situation is quite grave and things have finally settled down but...”

“Did they encounter another disaster?”

“Yes. Kaylie-sama also wants to work and help her family a bit.”

“If that’s the case then isn’t it better for her to be a tutor? Some of the work at my store will require physical labour, and if she wants to do another job, then it’s difficult to pay her a different salary.”

Tutoring was a common job that ladies did, and the salary wasn’t bad.

She heard that it was competitive, but Cordelia didn’t think it would be difficult for a lady whom Hazel recognised as smart.

However, Hazel shook her head seriously.

“Actually, I thought that as well and asked her to tutor my younger sister. But she gets nervous about talking to other people and couldn’t do well at all.”

“How bad is it?”

“It’s so bad that it’s difficult to explain it in words.”

“But you still recommended her, so she must be a lovely person.”

So that's why she wants to work at the back?

For the employees, the female magicians and servants at the Pameradia House will be taking turns to attend to the store until it settles down to some extent. She had told the testers about the commodities that will be available, and they seemed careful not to leak out information about the store before it opened. But once things settled down, she would have to hire employees, so she was currently looking for some.

“Alright. I’ll meet her at least.”

I probably don't have to worry much since Hazel recommended her. I won't lose anything by meeting her once even if I hire her or not.

“Thank you very much. However, there is something I want to tell you first. The Fiennes House has accepted a large loan from the Clydereine House so that they can work on the damaged rivers. Kaylie-sama, herself, doesn't seem to seem to like Shelley-sama that much, and they don't interact with each other, and it's questionable whether Shelley-sama is aware of Kaylie-sama's existence.”

“She is someone you recommended. I'm not worried about that.”

“Thank you very much. I'm so glad you said that.”

This time, Hazel was relieved to hear what Cordelia had said.

It was certainly a little worrying that her house was receiving help from Shelley's, but if she doesn't like Shelley, then it might work out in Cordelia's favour. It was reassuring even if just for show that someone who was in a position to believe in Shelley's words wanted to work for Cordelia.

(Although, I'm worried if this would trouble Kaylie-sama...)

But Cordelia isn't the person to judge that. If it wasn't alright, then Kaylie herself would refuse.

“Then, how about we meet the day after tomorrow? I'm free at any time.”

“Alright. I will talk to Kaylie-sama and contact you.”

What kind of lady will come? How bad is she with people?

She had various thoughts, but she probably wouldn't have been fortunate to meet such a shy lady if she hadn't been introduced to them.

When she thought like that, she started looking forward to it a little more.

◆◆◆◆◆

Two days later.

Cordelia welcomed Hazel and Kaylie Fiennes to the Pameradia mansion.

She had chosen the greenhouse for the interview since she thought that Kaylie would be able to relax more while being surrounded by greenery, but she was a bit troubled since she didn't know what to do in front of Kaylie.

Kaylie, who came with Hazel, was beyond nervous and the greenery had no effect.

(Even if I consider that this is our first meeting, she's more nervous than I expected her to be...)

Moreover, it was hard to see her expression because of her long, black bangs which hid her eyes if she looked down just a little. However, nothing will begin if Cordelia doesn't speak.

"Nice to meet you, Kaylie-sama. I am Cordelia Enna Pameradia. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance."

"M-my name... is Kaylie Fiennes. Pleased to make your acquaintance, too."

Cordelia continued to worry about how to continue the conversation without letting it show on her face since Kaylie had spoken in a barely audible voice. *Our conversation can continue if she stops being so nervous, but what is a light topic to talk about...?*

"... Is it no good... after all?"

"Huh? Hazel-sama?"

Cordelia reflexively looked at Hazel when she heard those surprising words.

"Excuse me, Cordelia-sama. She didn't mean anything bad by it. She's always admired you, so I was worried that she would be more nervous than usual, but it's just as I feared."

"Huh?"

"Kaylie-sama saw you four years ago. Now, Kaylie-sama, please tell her yourself."

When Cordelia moved her gaze to Kaylie, Kaylie timidly opened her mouth.

"My parents took me to the Flantheim's evening party four years ago, and that was where I saw you. You... were so beautiful and confident..."

As Cordelia listened to the voice that was gradually getting smaller, she recalled what had happened back then.

The evening party, that Otou-sama and Oba-sama took me to, was an outrageous event where I met Sylvester-sama. Still, I remember all the female acquaintances that I had made, but Kaylie-sama wasn't one of them. But I think it would be more difficult to forget someone that had this kind of aura...

"I couldn't talk to Cordelia-sama. Hmm... I watched you from afar... Because there were... a lot of ladies... around you..."

I certainly remembered accepting the invitation of the ladies because I wanted to get away from Sylvester-sama. Cordelia recalled the situation, and Kaylie's gaze gradually lowered.

"Umm... even if you were surrounded by all those people... you were gorgeous... You smelled really nice... and it smelled like a lot of flowers were... umm... blooming... you were just like a flower

fairy... and I've... admired you ever since then... You're still the same even though you've grown up... umm... really..."

Cordelia, who had turned red all the way up to her ears from the words Kaylie was saying, felt as if she was going to move to her. It was like she had just received a confession since Kaylie had plucked up all her courage to earnestly say those words. She was trying to gain attention so that people would be interested in the fragrance, but she never imagined that it would leave this deep of an impression on someone.

"See? They're quite passionate words, right? Cordelia-sama."

"Y-yes. Hmm, I'm happy that you have such a good impression of me."

"But admiring and work are different things. Please ask her a lot of questions."

Cordelia regained her composure at Hazel's words and stared at Kaylie. Kaylie was also staring at Cordelia through the gaps of her long bangs. Kaylie also seemed to have regained a bit of her composure after she told Cordelia, herself, why she was nervous.

"You may have already heard this from Hazel-sama, but you may need to do physical work such as carrying luggage if you work at the back."

"Y-yes. I often clean, so I'm used to moving luggage..."

Despite saying that, Kaylie looked down again.

Cordelia wondered for a second if something had happened, but then she realised that it was unusual for a lady to clean in this world.

She also cleaned things around her, but she didn't clean when it required heavy lifting. If she had, then she would be trespassing on the servant's work, and even if she didn't feel that way, it may seem like she was finding fault in their work.

I wonder if Kaylie-sama cleans because the Fiennes House doesn't have extra money. Even for commoners when they become wealthy, they ask servants to clean the surface of things in front of public gaze.

"Then, if Kaylie-sama would work for me then my store will be kept clean."

"N-no way...!"

Kaylie immediately shook her hair, but Cordelia was thankful that Kaylie knew what she could do even though she didn't know what she was good at.

Hazel, who was watching the interaction between the two, laughed.

"Kaylie-sama, you're supposed to say 『yes』, even if you're just showing off. You're too honest."

"B-but..."

"But that's your charm."

Apparently, Hazel cared about Kaylie because of that nature of hers.

“Well then, Kaylie-sama, would you like to try a 『trial period』 first?

“Trial...?”

“Yes. I also have to check with you to see if the wages and work suits you, and I still don’t know what you’re good at.”

I know she’s not a bad person, but I can’t imagine how she would adapt herself to the jobs I ask her to do because of her nervousness. Since I don’t need employees right now, I don’t have to rush and make the decision straight away.

Kaylie widened her eyes at Cordelia’s words and bowed.

“Thank you so much, Cordelia-sama...!! I... I look forward to working with you!”

“Me too. Kaylie-sama.”

Although Cordelia couldn’t see Kaylie’s expression, she heard her happy voice and thought that it would be nice if she could find a job for Kaylie.

Act 58: Exciting Opening Preparations

A few days before opening the store in the noble district, Cordelia was preparing for the store opening with Emina, Lara, and Ronnie.

The interior was already complete, and there were no problems with the warehouse. The only thing that they had to do with the exterior was to hang the signboard. Cordelia had been coming here to work every day, so the preparations had progressed considerably.

Cordelia decided that the name of her store would be 『Cordelia's Fragrance』.

Cordelia had wanted to use the name 『Pameradia』 or 『Ertiga』. The Pameradia fief was known for the quality of its plants and Ertiga was a famous trade city. Therefore, she thought that it would be easier to make a good impression that way, and she never thought about attaching her own name to the store.

However, the ladies in the Magician wing objected to this idea, and the other women also raised their objection towards this soon after.

The name 『Pameradia』 was too strongly attached to knights, they reasoned. The strength presented might be too much for women, and those who don't know Cordelia, might end up hating her first. Thus, Cordelia asked them about using the name 『Ertiga』, but they said that a woman's name might sound more appealing.

(There are stores that are named after people, but I never thought that my store would be named after me.)

She felt embarrassed, but Emina and Lara also agreed with the women in the Magician wing, so she decided to go with their opinion.

Among the things that were said, Cordelia had no choice but to agree with Lara's, "Even if the adults know about Ojou-sama, they will definitely think about Master if you use the name Pameradia." Although more people know her name now than in the past, compared to Elvis, Cordelia was still only 『Earl Pameradia's daughter』. She respected him, but she knew that wasn't the kind of advertisement she should use for women's cosmetics.

"Now, pull yourself together... Ronnie and Lara will sort out the goods that arrived yesterday. Emina, I would like you to fill the bottles and tag them."

"Yes, Ojou-sama."

"Leave it to us."

The bottles for the cosmetics were created at a shop that the Master of the magic tool shop had introduced her to. The price went up a bit because of this, but since it was imbued with magic, the bottles were airtight, and they preserved the products for longer. She had the help of the women from the Magician wing when she had framed up the bottles, so the products in these bottles probably lasted longer than any cosmetic products in this kingdom. Lastly, she had added decorations to the bottles, so they were pleasing to look at as well.

She was opening the store because there was a certain percentage of success, but she was still nervous since it was right before opening.

(I've done everything I can about the products. Now, for the sales floor.)

When she hyped herself up again, the bell at the door rang.

Kaylie had shown up.

“Go-good morning, Cordelia-sama.”

She was looking down and her voice was as quiet as always, but she seemed less tense than before.

“Good morning, Kaylie-sama. I look forward to working with you today.”

Cordelia tried to smile as softly as she could before returning Kaylie’s greeting.

Trial period, first day.

Cordelia thought it was harsh to make her talk to people on the first meeting, so she decided that the two of them will work today on the first day.

It was the first time that someone other than people from the Pameradia household had entered this store, and she was curious about Kaylie’s opinion, but Kaylie was already overwhelmed, and wasn’t composed enough to look at the interior of the shop.

“First of all, I’ll show you the sales floor.”



Cordelia explained the items in the store to Kaylie, one by one.

The store offered essential oils and balms, as well as cosmetic products such as lotions and emulsions, and bathing products such as soaps and shampoos. If this kingdom had the custom of soaking in bathtubs, then Cordelia could also sell a lot of bath salts and bath bombs, but unfortunately, this kingdom didn't have such a custom so she only had a few products on the shelf for this category. She wanted to trial foot baths, but it was difficult since she had to remodel her house for that.

"Also, we have small accessories placed here. Women like things like this, so I thought it would be fun for them to look at accessories as well."

"They're all... cute... Hmm, this is...?"

"They're jewellery boxes. I prepared those boxes just in case someone wants to buy our products as gifts."

She had prepared various jewellery boxes: some were decorated with natural gems and cameos, others only had engraving on the wood, and some were music boxes.

Other than that, she also had potpourri and small plants for decoration. She had put cactus, which she didn't need, in glass containers and decorated them with colour sand. This plant was rarely seen in this kingdom. She also had nutritional supplements available for houseplants and had packaged them as cute as she could.

She also had corsages, which was introduced to her by Christina, as a commodity and decorations for the shelves.

"You really do think of a lot of things, Cordelia-sama... You have... so many wonderful things here..."

"I didn't come up with everything. But, it's a lot of fun to think of things that might make others happy. If others enjoy it, then it's a wonderful thing."

She could not have thought of a lot of things if she didn't have her previous life's memories, and she couldn't have produced some products without the help of Elvis and Ronnie. Still, if these results lead to someone smiling, then she was happy.

"I'll ask you to remember the details of the products later... This is the store's interior."

"The products in this store are different from the products in other stores that I've seen, and it makes me extremely curious... Hmm, there's something I want to ask... but, what is that room?"

Kaylie was looking at a room that was separated from the room where Cordelia and Kaylie were in. The lower half of the wall was natural wood, the upper half was made out of glass, and it was connected by a full glass door, which was rare in this kingdom.

Cordelia smiled at Kaylie.

"Actually, that's the room that I want you to work in today."

Cordelia opened the door and urged Kaylie to enter.

Like the wall that separated this room from the sales floor, the back wall was covered in wood panelling up to waist length, and the upper half was covered with white paint. There were tables and chairs arranged at a moderate distance away from each other in the room, and a counter nearby.

“This room is where people who buy products can take breaks. We will offer the customers different sweets that are good for their body here.”

She wanted to offer customers tea, herbal tea, and sample sweets while they were taking a break in this room. The teacups would be small since she wasn't charging them a fee for it, but they could purchase the items afterwards if they like it. For sweets, she would be offering a daily special of agar jelly, donuts made from bean curds, cookies made from vegetables, muffins and dried fruits. Of course, these sweets could be purchased as well.

“I received the tablecloths this morning, so would you like to help me set it up?”

She could have just left this job to Emina and Lara, but she wanted to know if this room was actually calming or not. Also, since this was her shop, she wanted to prepare things with her own hands first, and she also wanted time to get used to Kaylie.

After all the tablecloths had been set, Cordelia prepared small cards and cube card stands.

“These cards have a brief description of the items on sale as well as their prices.”

“Is that the logo of the shop... in the top right corner?”

“Yes. We had them drawn with stencils.”

“It's... very nice. Cordelia-sama will be admired by more women from now on.”

Kaylie smiled a little since she liked the logo.

“But this part covers what I'm not good at.”

“What you're not good at?”

“Yeah. I actually wanted to draw a picture of each of the plants on the cards, but it was difficult for me. That's why I made a stencil to make this work out.”

She also thought about outsourcing this task, but she didn't want information about the shop leaking out before the opening, and the servants were also careful not to say anything about the shop.

“But, the logo of the shop is very elegant.”

Kaylie added, and Cordelia laughed while taking out a postcard-sized piece of paper from the wooden box nearby.

“I like this card, so I'm glad that I'll be using it. This is an example of the menu that we'll be offering...”

The paper that Cordelia gave to Kaylie was unbleached, and the letters on the paper were written using a tea-based ink.

“Unusual tea names... And carrot cake? Is there a problem with this...?”

“The problem doesn’t lie in the menu items, but the appearance of the menu. I actually wanted to add some illustrations on the menu too, but the menu will change every day, and the size of the letters will change too, so it won’t be on the card. Also, I wanted different designs for the menu since it will be changing every day, but I don’t have the luxury.”

It didn’t look horrible, so she decided to use this for the time being since a simple menu wasn’t a bad idea either.

“...”

“Kaylie-sama? What’s the matter?”

“Hmm... Umm...”

Kaylie hesitated as her eyes loitered around the room, but she eventually opened her mouth after making up her mind.

“If you’re alright with it... can I draw something for it?”

“Huh? Are you good at drawing, Kaylie-sama?”

“Hmm, umm, err, I’m not good at it, hmm, and I don’t know if you will like it...”

Kaylie looked down again when she heard Cordelia’s excitement. Cordelia panicked because she thought she had surprised Kaylie, and quickly shook her head.

“If you don’t mind, then can I ask you to draw me something? There are a few stencils for drawing, but if you need anything else, then I can prepare them for you right away.”

“No, you don’t need to...! I can’t have you do that since I don’t even know if you will like it. Umm, I can bring my own tools tomorrow if you don’t mind...”

“Is that alright? Then, thank you.”

This was probably the first time Kaylie talked about herself. Moreover, it was about her own special skill. It didn’t sound like she had much confidence in her skills, but if her skills were really bad, then she wouldn’t have offered to draw something.

“U-um, Cordelia-sama. Is it alright... if I go get my tools now... after all? I feel bad for making you wait, so...”

“Of course, you can, as long as you’re alright with that. I’ll have the carriage ready for you right away.”

Fortunately, the carriage was waiting nearby since there was a chance that she would go home several times to get things.

Cordelia was thrilled to see what kind of picture Kaylie would draw for the menu and she looked forward to seeing what kind of person Kaylie was.



Kaylie came back faster than Cordelia had expected.

When Cordelia guided Kaylie to the office, Emina and Lara were working there. Kaylie was surprised for a second, but the two bowed and moved to another place to work, so she was relieved.

“I think those two will help you quite a bit, so I’ll introduce you to them later. Please use that desk over there.”

“Th-thank you very much. Hmm, Cordelia-sama... what do you want me to draw?”

“I want a gentle drawing, like a plant or small animal, but I’ll be happy if you draw anything you think would suit the menu.”

Kaylie nodded nervously at Cordelia’s request, and spread out her art supplies. Her art supplies were stored in a few glass cases.

She was interested in Kaylie’s art supplies, but she thought that Kaylie would be too nervous if she were to watch, so she decided to leave.

However, she realised that Kaylie’s attention was no longer directed at her.

As Cordelia stared at her silently, Kaylie picked up her brush and soaked the brush. Then, after she wiped the water away with a cloth, she directly tipped her brush into the colour case. With colour on her brush, she brushed it a few times on a plate instead of a palette, then ran her brush over the paper. She didn’t mix her paint, and when she wanted a lighter colour, it seemed like she adjusted the shade with the coloured water that was left on the palette.

(It may look like that, but it may be completely different...)

She wasn’t confident because it was completely different from how she learnt how to paint in her previous world’s art classes. In the first place, it seemed mysteriously magical that Kaylie hadn’t done a rough sketch and had just started painting directly.

Meanwhile, the picture that Kaylie had finished painting was of a red clover flower and a green clover. They looked very soft and gentle, and the colours made the menu stand out. Above all, Kaylie had barely taken any time at all to paint this.

“Kaylie-sama, you’re amazing! And it looks wonderful!”

“Th-thank you very much...”

Cordelia was charmed by the painting, but Kaylie’s voice cracked despite it being small.

“It’s kind of a waste to have you draw the daily menus.”

“N-no... As you can see, I can paint them quickly, and... It’s a special skill that I don’t have much use for elsewhere, so if it can help you...”

“You must have magic hands since you’re able to create such a wonderful thing straight away.”

Kaylie's ears turned red at those words, and Cordelia came up with an idea.

"Umm... If you're alright with it, would you like to use your skill more?"

"Huh?"

"I thought about offering a message service for people who might buy our products as souvenirs or gifts. I was going to prepare an art relief for the card, but since you have such talent, how about we sell special cards painted by you as well?"

Kaylie widened her eyes at those words, then shook her head vigorously.

"No, but, I can't..."

"That's not true. I can't do it, but it's wonderful because you can. Of course, I don't mind if the profits from this are added to your income."

Cordelia watched as Kaylie nodded lightly and was relieved.

She was curious about why Kaylie didn't have much confidence, but she was able to find something that Kaylie excelled in and was happy that they could work hard together.

◆◆◆◆◆

"It seems like your shop is thriving."

"Yes, fortunately."

It has been a month since 『Cordelia's Fragrance』 opened.

Cordelia stopped by Marquis Flantheim's mansion on her way back home from the shop, and received hospitality from Vernoux, even though it was she who usually entertained. However, the sweets and tea in front of them were gifts from Cordelia.

She came here to deliver Sara's balm, and also give Vernoux some sweets since he loves them.

Unfortunately, Sara was sick and was sleeping, but she encountered Vernoux, who had just returned home, while she was leaving the items to the maid.

"It's thriving, and it seems like you have plenty of stock."

"We barely have enough, but I have been preparing for the opening for a long time, so we're managing somehow."

"Oh. Are there a lot of female customers?"

"Surprisingly, we have a lot of male customers too, but they have their items delivered to them."

"Men?"

“I used to send essential oils to Isma-oniisama from time to time, so I befriended the other knights as well. However, there’s an overwhelming number of females that actually visit the store.”

Cordelia was stunned when Isma had asked her if she could deliver since there were a lot of knights who were looking forward to the products being sold.

They wanted to purchase the products as gifts for the wives and lovers, as well as for personal use. Cordelia welcomed a large audience for her products, so she conducted deliveries and out-of-business trade during the knights’ lunch break.

“Well, they have more time to think about it like that. When mother visited your store, she said she had met a lot of acquaintances. You’ve become the woman of the hour in the blink of an eye.”

“Don’t tease me too much.”

“I’m serious. If it’s good news, then I should share it, right?”

Judging from her childhood friend’s expression, he was half-serious and half-joking, but he was outspoken like usual.

“However, mother said that the products she requests from you directly are better.”

“That’s because the magic I use to collect the essential oils belongs to the Pameradia House. I don’t offer bad quality products at my store, but there’s still a difference. Of course, that difference is reflected in the price.”

“Then, mother was lucky. I’m glad that you can make mother happy, but don’t you think it’s time for you to deepen your relationship with other nobles?”

“If you’re referring to evening parties, then I’m thinking of attending them soon. I thought it would be difficult to go to them this month since I’ve been tired, but I do think I should participate in them soon.”

She wanted to be in perfect condition at the evening parties, but her situation was still hectic, and if she continued to be absent from the parties, then she feared that people might view her as unsociable. She had the excuse that her shop had just opened, but even under normal circumstances, Elvis was unsociable, Cyrus was training at the fief, and Isma was working every day as the deputy commander. If Cordelia continued to be absent from the evening parties, then it was possible that people would say, 『Well, she is from the Pameradia House after all』. She wanted to avoid that at all costs.

“You’re brave.”

“Actually, Onee-sama told me that I should find my own partner if I want to get married. In a way, that’s a battle as well.”

“Ah, so you want to slip through the Earl’s iron guard?”

Vernoux wasn’t surprised and raised the corner of his lips.

“The invitations are coming one after the other, aren’t they? Which one are you going to?”

“I don’t know. I’d like to talk to a lot of people though.”

“How about going to the evening party at Myles’s place? The Gunnel House’s evening parties are gorgeous and filled with people. They also talk a lot about business. You won’t be that nervous at the party since you know Myles, right?”

“That’s true... Viscount Gunnel invited me directly when I met him.”

He might have just said that to be polite since it was at her coming of age ceremony, but still, she wanted to answer the invitation since the head had invited her directly.

“I’m sure Clay will be there too.”

“Oh my, Clive-sama will? I haven’t seen him in a while, so I’m looking forward to meeting him.”

“Unfortunately, there’s nothing to look forward to. He hasn’t changed at all.”

“Does that also include the fact that you still put him on the spot?”

Vernoux lightly whimpered when he heard Cordelia’s words and turned away.

She had expected it, but it seemed like Clive was still having trouble with Vernoux.

“Well, this will actually be my first time going to Myles’s evening party. Anyway, why don’t you attend with a dress that has a lot of impact?”

“A dress with a lot of impact?”

Cordelia tilted her head and Vernoux nodded seriously.

“It’s better to stand out if there’s a lot of people, right? For example, how about a crimson dress? I feel like Countess Weltoria also wears a lot of dresses with red on them, but I think that colour would suit you.”

He must be referring to her eye colour and favourite roses.

“I’ll think about it if the opportunity arises.”

“You can create as many opportunities as you want. It’s a colour with a lot of energy, right? It’s not like you to not try something that will probably look good on you.”

“... I might choose to wear a crimson dress if I find myself in a situation where I have to be strong.”

I might need to make myself stand out if I find myself on a stage where I can’t back down.

(Besides... if I can get the best result by wearing a red dress, then I might be able to separate myself from the dreadful shadow of 『Cordelia』.)

I don’t think her personality and mine are the same, but it still bothers me.

“I don’t care either way, but red is a lucky colour isn’t it?”

“Yes. But only on dresses.”

“Hmm. Then should I watch carefully if you appear in a red dress?”

She couldn't judge from Vernoux's expression whether he was curious or worried about his childhood friend. However, if he were there, then it wouldn't take a turn for the worse even if he was only curious.

"Well, either way, I'm going to Myles's."

"I see."

I'm sure I still have about ten days.

"Then, I'll look forward to it."

"Is there something for you to look forward to, Vernoux-sama?"

"Yeah. Something interesting might happen."

"... Those words give me a bad feeling."

"Rude. Well, I'm just anticipating that you won't be able to do anything because a lot of people will crowd around you. If you're surrounded by women, then you wouldn't be able to have two blessings at once, now would you?"

"That's too much of an exaggeration."

A woman who makes another woman wait upon them, ——— is that what he's imagining?

(If it's just that, then it's not something I have to worry about.)

Even if he had said that she was a disappointment, then it would irritate her, but it didn't trouble her.

"I'll be leaving now."

"Alright. It's not good for you to go back too late. I'll give the items to my mother."

She handed the items that she was going to give to the maid, to Vernoux. In the small basket was a card which stated the name of the product that she had brought today and how to use it.

"That's a nice card. The picture looks faint, did you draw this at the shop?"

"Yes. A wonderful woman drew it for me."

"Oh."

Vernoux was unusually interested and Cordelia laughed.

"Vernoux-sama, please talk to me when you want to gift someone something."

"Well, I hope there won't be a day when I have to rely on you."

"Oh my, that's rude."

Cordelia lightly shrugged and brushed off his comment since he was probably just trying to hide his embarrassment.

"Come to think of it, this is rare. I never see you wear bracelets."

“Does it look good on me?”

“Well, it probably does, doesn’t it?”

Shouldn’t you compliment me at a time like this even if they’re just empty words? She thought while gently brushing her hands over the slender bracelets on her left arm.

One of them was delivered with the other products on the day of her shop opening, and Cordelia wore it with the bracelet that she had received from her mother. The package said it was from the Flantheim House, but she knew straight away that it was from Gille because the letter inside had said

『Congratulations on opening your store』. However, Gille probably hadn’t told Vernoux anything about the store since Vernoux hadn’t said anything and he looked like he was hearing it for the first time.

(I’m happy he’s congratulating me, but he should have said it to me directly.)

However, Cordelia liked that the design was simple, elegant and went with any type of clothing. Moreover, she always wore it on her because it mysteriously healed her whenever she felt tired.

When will I be able to thank him? She thought vaguely as Vernoux walked her home.

Act 59: The Evening Party Brings a Stormy Premonition

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On the day of her first evening party since her coming of age ceremony, Cordelia was at her shop until noon.

The female magicians at the shop told her to quickly go home and that she was exactly like Elvis because she worked too much, but she smiled wryly because she was still doing what she liked compared to him. Also, she needed to redouble her efforts in terms of ability.

In the midst of this conversation, Cordelia saw that Kaylie was having her first conversation with a customer.

Normally, she would work behind the scenes and was told what the customer wanted, but she seemed to have a new idea, so she wanted to talk to the customer. She seemed nervous throughout the conversation, but she looked satisfied when the conversation ended, and her tension disappeared.

She hadn't gone as far as handing the card directly to the customer after she had finished it in the blink of an eye, but she did open the door a little to see the delighted reaction from the customer and raised a small voice in joy.

"You're very popular, Kaylie-sama."

"Th-thank you very much, Cordelia-sama."

Kaylie quickly looked down when Cordelia spoke to her, but she steadily looked at Cordelia and spoke in a small voice.

"Hmm... Mm... It makes me want to do something when I know that someone like me has created something that makes someone happy."

"I understand that feeling."

Cordelia agreed and Kaylie relaxed a little.

"This shop... is amazing after all. I've only seen a little... but still, the customers are smiling, and they come every day... As I thought, your charm is apparent in this shop as well."

Kaylie seemed happy as if she was talking about herself and Cordelia felt very embarrassed. Of course, she was happy that the customers were happy and even more so when a worker at the shop could experience this directly.

However, there was something that Cordelia couldn't let go.

"Kaylie-sama, can you stop with the 'someone like me'?"

"Huh...?"

"Your work is great and it's wasteful for you to attach words like that to your work."

Kaylie was puzzled by Cordelia's words.

“But...”

“The customers are happy because it’s art that you have made, Kaylie-sama. I’m sure those people will be sad if they were to hear you say something like that.”

However, Kaylie slowly shook her head.

“I’m... I’m really happy that you found something that I could do to make the customers happy... But I really can’t do anything else... So, someone like me, is the correct way of speaking.”

“Even though you think like that, I think you’re wonderful.”

At those words, Kaylie looked up as if she had snapped and looked at Cordelia a little flustered.

“Hmm, if it’s alright with you.... Can I ask what part of me is?”

“Of course. But, do you mind if I tell you a lot?”

“Huh...?”

“First of all, you’re a very kind and caring person. Even if you’re not good at speaking with others, I can tell that you’re kind and caring since I saw you prioritised the customer’s happiness today. And, I also feel like you’re smart. Your dark hair is also very nice.”

“Huh... Hmm, this hair?”

“Yes, it’s a very nice and calming colour.”

“Hmm... Umm... Really...?”

Kaylie was upset as if she had misheard Cordelia’s words.

However, what Cordelia had said was true and not flattery.

There weren’t many people with black hair in this kingdom, and it was a colour that Cordelia was very familiar with.

“I, I, I wish I had a nice hair colour like yours, Cordelia-sama... If I had a hair colour like yours, then I would... I might have a little more confidence than I do now.”

“Do you hate your own hair colour?”

“... I was told 『it looks like a wet crow caught in the rain』 when I was younger... I thought that I looked like that because I’m gloomy...”

“Excuse me?”

“Everyone in my family has black hair. But I’m the only one who was told that... Perhaps, if my personality... was a tenth as bright as Cordelia-sama’s... then I might not have looked like that.”

Cordelia was speechless at the words 『wet crow』.

(No, I’m certain it’s not a word from this kingdom——.)

Suspicion welled up within Cordelia, *isn’t she horribly misunderstanding something?*

“Kaylie-sama, just to be sure, but were you told 『wet crow』?”

“Huh? Hmm... I wondered if wet crows were this colour.”

Cordelia sighed in relief when she heard Kaylie’s answer.

“Kaylie-sama, that was probably a compliment.”

People didn’t avoid or honour crows in this kingdom. So, it wasn’t strange for Kaylie-sama to take the words 『wet crow caught in the rain』 as is.

(But this world probably has that expression too.)

There are several products in this world that were liked in Japan. Like the fox mask that Gille-sama has and the glass pens. It wouldn’t be strange for that expression to exist here since there were things in this world that are associated with Japan.

“In the first place, there aren’t any nobles who would say bad things about your hair colour. I mean, doesn’t His Highness Sylvester have the same hair colour?”

“Th-that’s....”

“I don’t know who told you that, but does that person hate the royal family?”

Kaylie shook her head vigorously at Cordelia’s question. *Then there’s almost no mistake.*

“I know the words 『wet crow』 as a compliment. It also means that your hair is jet black. It is a saying that refers to beautiful, glossy hair. I think that person read some kind of book and said it to you.”

Cordelia smiled at Kaylie since she felt that it was possible that it was a bad pick-up line. Kaylie didn’t seem to believe her and looked puzzled, but she couldn’t argue since Cordelia had brought up Sylvester’s name.

“I would like to propose something to you, Kaylie-sama.”

“Wh-what is it...?”

“Why don’t you style your bangs? I’m sure it’ll make you look brighter.”

Kaylie’s wish of wanting to be brighter can change with her appearance with a little adjustment. Kaylie’s bangs were really long right now, so her aura can change just by her sweeping it to the side even if she doesn’t cut it.

“I, I’ll think about... it...”

However, it must be embarrassing for Kaylie. Cordelia was a little disappointed that she didn’t get an immediate answer, but Kaylie hadn’t rejected her proposal. *I’ll just hope secretly*, Cordelia thought.

“But as I thought... I still don’t have enough knowledge. You realised that it was a compliment straight away... I’m still inexperienced.”

“I just knew this by chance. And, it’s the person’s fault for saying something that was hard to understand.”

Even if Kaylie-sama won't tell this to the person who said that to her, I'm sure she doesn't get that I'm speaking ill of them.

(I'll be careful too. It'll be terrible if something outrageous happens because I was careless.)

I know that the meaning changes depending on the culture, but I can't help but think that when I see that she's been hurt for so long because of some words.

"Hmm... Cordelia-sama. You're going to the evening party tonight, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Hmm, take care."

"Thank you very much."

Even though Cordelia thanked her, she didn't know how to react.

She can't be worried about my basic mannerism, right?

However, I only pray that her nice words don't become a strange omen.

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At night, Cordelia visited the Gunnell mansion.

Cordelia hadn't appeared at a night party since her coming of age ceremony and Myles called out to her.

"Welcome, Cordelia-san."

"Good evening, Myles-sama. Thank you for inviting me today."

"No, I'm glad you came. I thought it would be impossible since you're busy."

She was relieved when she heard that it was the voice of an acquaintance. She didn't think she was nervous, but it turned out that she was so nervous that she hadn't noticed she was.

"But, are you alright? I heard that your shop is thriving too. You're not tired?"

"It's a little hard, but I'm thankful that it's busy. And if I always stay away then everyone will forget about me."

"They won't forget about you if your shop is thriving. In fact, it's still getting a lot of attention. Mother also said she wanted to visit your shop, so she might talk to you later."

Viscountess Gunnell, who was a little further away, was surrounded by women her age and they seemed to be talking excitedly, so Cordelia might bother them if she were to interrupt. However, if Viscountess Gunnell was interested in her products, then she would like to find the opportunity to talk to her before she left.

"Please have fun. I would like to ask you to dance with me, but I'm sure the women will hate me for it."

Cordelia also looked around when Myles did and she noticed that the guests... especially the women, had their gazes on her.

“If I talk to you for a long time, then they might think that they have less time to talk to you.”

Cordelia remained quiet for a bit after he joked around, then sighed.

I'm happy that they want to talk to me, but it isn't good in this situation.

It's worth it to come here just to be able to talk to women and build connections with them, but I also came here to look for a future partner. I'll have to make adjustments if even the organiser, my friend Myle-sama, thinks that it's hard to invite me to dance. I want to at least dance with him once to show people that I'm not hard to approach.

“Oh my, are you unsatisfied with me being your partner, Myles-sama?”

“Huh? No way!”

“Oh, my bad. I thought you were refusing me politely.”

Myles was surprised by Cordelia's joke and quickly shrugged.

“But... Hmm, that's right. It's rude to not invite you for a dance when you took time out of your busy schedule to come here. Well, Milady, may I have a dance?”

Cordelia put her hand on the outstretched hand and headed to the centre of the hall.

She hadn't been worried about dancing, but then she suddenly noticed while halfway to the dancefloor.

(Somehow, it's embarrassing...)

She didn't think that there was something wrong with her dancing.

(Close...!)

She knew that her dance partner would be close since this wasn't her first dance, but she noticed that she was nervous even when dancing with a relatively close friend like Myles.

I have danced with Gille-sama before although no one was around. But if I were to dance with him now... then would I be able to dance calmly like I had back then?

(Is this... what they call growth?)

The only thing I can do now is believe that I would get used to it the more I do this.

Cordelia returned to her original place with Myles after the dance was over. She really respected those who could dance with multiple partners in one night since she was more fatigued than she thought she would be.

“Nice dancing, Myles and Cordelia-san.”

“Clifton. You came.”

“Of course, I would. I'm free after all.”

The first time Cordelia had met Clifton, the son of Duke Hack, was with Myles. They both belonged to families that had a marine-based business, and they also got along well because of their calm personalities.

“I’m sorry for asking this when you’re tired, but I would like to ask you something, Cordelia-san... Is it alright?”

“What is it?”

“I want to send a woman a gift. Can you help me?”

Clifton asked lightly, but Cordelia could tell his true feelings from how he was acting. She didn’t expect anyone to ask her for help with love here, but if he trusted her and wanted to rely on her for this, then she would like to support him.

“I’ll be happy to help. My shop also sells cute items. Since it’s you, Clifton-sama, it would be alright for you to come look at the items when the shop is closed. You can take your time to view the items this way.”

“Thanks. I really didn’t want to talk about this with mother or sister.”

“Somehow, I can understand your feelings.”

Even Cordelia would be embarrassed if she had to consult Elvis or Isma about love. No, in Elvis’s case since he refused to talk about her marriage interviews, she felt like he wouldn’t give her any advice to begin with.

“Then, I’ll let you know later. It seems like the women’s patience has reached their limits.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

Clifton and Myles looked around and smiled.

Then, on that signal, the women began approaching Cordelia. At the same time, they said before leaving, “Have fun.”

“Cordelia-sama, it’s been a long time.”

“You’re beautiful today too.”

“Your clothes look nice, but you also smell amazing.”

“I visited your shop yesterday. I was surprised to find out that there was spinach in the chiffon cake. The bright green colour was gorgeous, and it didn’t feel like I was eating vegetables even though it was made from vegetables and it was delicious.”

The women surrounded Cordelia in the blink of an eye.

At that time, Cordelia recalled Vernoux’s expression from the other day. *Did he guess that this would happen?*

She knew some of the ladies, but at present, the only person who she could say that she was friends with was Hazel. Unfortunately, she wasn't here today, but if other ladies talked to her, then she had to respond.

However, Cordelia's insight had been overly optimistic.

She was really grateful that they gave her a lot of attention...

(But I feel like my throat is starting to hurt.)

Whenever she attended tea parties with Nirupama, she was often the listener, when she talked with Vernoux, they talked the same amount and when she talked with Hazel, Hazel did most of the talking.

She had talked a lot at her coming of age ceremony, but the fatigue she had felt at that time had to do with her nervousness. However, she could talk with people slowly now unlike the last time, so they kept asking her short questions and she didn't have time to rest her mouth.

(It's also exhausting to be the hottest topic.)

Nirupama-obasama is quite talkative, but I've never seen her act tired from talking. I need to get used to this too after all. It seems like I have to work hard.

(But, I'm thirsty...)

It happened when she thought that.

"Would you like something to drink, Milady?"

"Excuse me?"

"Just kidding. How is it? Are you having fun?"

"My, Vernoux-sama."

The women around her raised their voices when Vernoux spoke to Cordelia from among the crowd of people. Vernoux didn't pay attention to those women, but he had an amused expression on his face, so it seemed like he had been gazing at the situation for a long time.

Vernoux had spoken jokingly and had presented the glass in his hand to Cordelia as if it was nothing.

At the same time, the women naturally distanced themselves from Cordelia.

They had done that because Vernoux was the son of a Marquis, but also because they concluded that it was better to give her time to moisturise her throat since she had been talking nonstop. 『We'll talk to you later』 they said before they left.

Vernoux put his own glass to his lips and Cordelia also drank the glass that she had been given.

"I had pretty good timing, didn't I?"

"Yes, thank you very much."

"Give me back something in return. Anyway, something interesting happened, didn't it?"

"I appreciated some things. But I'm not the only person who has something interesting happen to them."

"Really?"

Some of the ladies were looking over at Cordelia and Vernoux while blushing. They probably weren't looking at Cordelia, but at Vernoux. She had already gotten too used to him, but she realised once again that he was someone who made the ladies blush.

"It seemed fruitful."

"Yes. It was quite fun to talk to different people."

"Different people?"

Cordelia raised her eyebrows since his words seemed to have a hidden meaning behind them.

"Don't look at me like that. I just think you're right."

"What do you mean?"

"For example, His Highness is also here. Myles is His Highness's classmate."

"Eh?!"

"Of course, he's incognito. A lot of people really came, didn't they?"

She wanted to think that he was joking, but when she looked where he was looking, she certainly saw a young man with black hair.

That was definitely Prince Sylvester.

Clive was by Sylvester's side, and the other people around them seemed to be paying attention to Sylvester as well, but they didn't seem surprised that he had come. She felt like she was the person who was the most surprised by this as far as she could tell.

(When the heck did he get here?)

Cordelia hadn't noticed him arrive at all.

"It's not that unusual. This isn't the first time he's gone incognito. When His Majesty was young, he would attend evening parties when the opportunity presented itself."

"I, I see..."

"You seem surprised."

"Because I never heard that he would be here."

Rather, why aren't you surprised? Come to think of it, it was Vernoux-sama who recommended that I come to the Gunnel evening party.

(... No, I'm thinking too much. Vernoux-sama isn't trying to make His Highness and I meet.)

He doesn't benefit at all from introducing me to His Highness.

To begin with, Prince Sylvester had come here incognito, so I don't have to go all the way there to say hello. There's a lot of people here, and if the Prince just talks to the people who he wants to talk to, then I don't need to get involved.

When I was awarded the permit to enter the Big Bookcase, he had told me that he wanted to talk to me more, but two years had passed since then. He has probably already forgotten what he wants to talk to me about.

Cordelia looked at the middle of the hall while being careful not to pay too much attention to Sylvester. When she thought that it wasn't strange for her to respond like this, she felt Vernoux move.

His movement gave her a bad feeling.

No, it wasn't a bad feeling, she was confident.

There was no doubt that Sylvester would approach them because Vernoux had greeted him lightly.

She curtsied gracefully as she endured not screaming as Sylvester approached slowly. She honestly wanted to leave, but she couldn't pretend not to notice someone as Earl Pameradia's daughter.

(But, Vernoux-sama is so mischievous! Why did he invite His Highness over here?! Shouldn't he go to greet His Highness himself at times like this!)

Maybe I shouldn't care about this since it doesn't look like His Highness does, but it doesn't have to be right now, does it?!

"You arrived earlier than I expected, Your Highness."

"Because I finished a lot of things quickly. ——— It's been a long time, Cordelia-san. Do you remember me?"

"Of course, Your Highness Sylvester."

Sylvester seemed more mature than when she had met him two years ago, and he had grown into a young man with a gentle aura.

And, his face looked exactly like the game in her previous life.

(He really became 『Prince Sylvester』 …)

It was unavoidable that she wanted to avert her gaze from him.

Cordelia urgently wanted to disappear from this situation as soon as possible as Sylvester had attracted more attention when he walked over here.

(Now that I've greeted him, I can leave since I'll get in the way of his chat with Vernoux-sama, right?)
Alright, I'm leaving.

She made up her mind, but Sylvester opened his mouth faster than Cordelia moved.

"I heard that you went to Weltoria to learn a lot of things."

"Yes. I spent my time wisely there."

Did he hear this from Vernoux? Or did he hear about it from someone else? In any case, Cordelia's cheeks twitched since she had been brought up in conversation somewhere.

“It might not be as good as real experience, but please use the Big Bookcase again. I’m sure the Big Bookcase is waiting for you to visit.”

“Thank you very much.”

She didn’t want to talk anymore about the experience, but luckily, it didn’t seem like Sylvester had a bad impression of her. *I think he wouldn’t even meet me if he hated me, but it’s also frustrating that my position as an Earl’s daughter makes that difficult. However, I think that this much is polite for him even if he doesn’t hate me to that point.*

“Oh yes, Dilly, you were dancing with Myles before, weren’t you?”

“Huh? Yes.”

“Were you able to dance without stepping on his feet?”

Cordelia widened her eyes at Vernoux’s banter.

“Of course!”

Why did he say something rude in this place?

Doesn’t that sound like I always fail at dancing? If Vernoux-sama has been watching me since the last evening party, then he should know that he doesn’t have to worry about that.

However, Vernoux looked at Cordelia amusingly when she refuted.

“Then, that’s convenient.”

“Huh?”

“Your Highness, do you want to dance once in a while? It’s not always fun just to practice. Dilly just said that she’s good at dancing.”

Cordelia almost screamed at Vernoux since he had said something outrageous.

“Me? Isn’t it better for me to dance with you, Vernoux-sama?”

“It’s disgusting, isn’t it? That situation. Give me a break.”

Can I take your distress as a joke? Vernoux shrugged then laughed. He had been serious, and not joking, but it wasn’t something that should be said out loud. All that’s left is to hope that Sylvester-sama would refuse to dance with me.

(If he’s here incognito then he wouldn’t do something that would make him stand out.)

Cordelia believed as she waited for Sylvester’s response.

However, her smile froze on her face when he presented his hand to her.

“Then, can I have this dance?”

“With pleasure.”

Even though she had replied straight away, she muttered, “No way!” in her mind.

Should I say that it's thanks to the results of my lady training that I was able to behave perfectly despite thinking something completely opposite from what I said? Vernoux-sama did something unnecessary, she thought as she once again returned to the middle of the hall. Having a worn-out throat is better than this. When I danced with Myles-sama, we had attracted the attention of those around us, but I'm getting more attention right now.

Cordelia really wanted to get away from this situation, but since she had gotten this far, she won't run away until she finished dancing a song with him. Then, she thought about dancing so well that she would fascinate those around her and leave an impression in their minds.

(If I can't run away, then I should use this chance to show people what a wonderful lady I am, or it would be a big loss...!)

But Cordelia widened her eyes as soon as the dance began.

(He's good...!)

The first thing she felt was that simple impression.

I didn't think he was bad, but I can't complain about his steps and tempo even though it's the first time I'm dancing with him. Are we just compatible or did he happen to see me dance with Myles-sama?

Cordelia was surprised and Sylvester met her eyes.

Sylvester looked like he had been caught unaware for a moment, but he instantly smiled gently.

"It was worth practicing."

"Excuse me?"

"I thought I would dance weirdly because I'm nervous. I might show you something uncool."

Sylvester-sama might not be used to dancing in front of people since Vernoux-sama had said he only practices.

(But it doesn't seem like he has to worry since he's this good at dancing... Perhaps, did Vernoux-sama think it would be alright if something happened since Sylvester-sama is dancing with me...?)

I was chosen as a practice partner to give Sylvester-sama confidence because it was convenient. When she thought of it like that, she felt a little calmer. If I dance automatically, then I'll be released from this soon.

"You're very good at dancing and I don't feel like it's my first time dancing with you."

"I'm honoured."

"I'm sure the ladies who dance with Your Highness in the future will all say the same."

"... I'll have to do my best to make sure that happens."

Cordelia felt like his cheerful voice had dropped a little, so she looked at his expression, but he didn't seem uneasy. The song ended when she thought that she had misheard him, and they returned to their original location.

Then, Vernoux greeted them back with a light applause.

“Your Highness, you’ve shown the results of your practicing. Dilly, you danced well.”

“Yeah, it was fun.”

Cordelia only curtsied lightly in reply, but Sylvester, who had answered Vernoux, released Cordelia’s hand and smiled.

“Thank you very much for dancing with me, Your Highness.”

“I should be the one saying that.”

It ended without incident~.

Cordelia calmed down a lot since she felt relieved.

I’ll ask Vernoux-sama about his reckless gesture at a later date, but now I need to leave.

“Then, Your Highness and Vernoux-sama. I…”

Will excuse myself now.

Cordelia’s arm was suddenly pulled before she could finish her sentence and her back was turned to Vernoux and Sylvester.

She was stunned by the power behind the pull, but she widened her eyes when she saw who had pulled her.

“You, you’re a beautiful person, aren’t you! What’s your name?”

Shelley, who she hadn’t seen in two years, was standing there.

Why is Shelley here? Maybe she’s here because she’s Earl Clydereine’s daughter, or even if she doesn’t have an invitation, someone she knew could have brought her here.

But, more importantly ———.

(She asked for my name…?)

Don’t tell me it’s because she doesn’t recognise me. She seems really stupid to have forgotten the name of someone who she had verbally attacked two years ago.

However, acting like she didn’t know Cordelia even though she was making it clear that she didn’t like her was clearly contradictory.

(What is she up to? Those words sound familiar ———.)

She thought, then suddenly noticed.

(Is this perhaps the first meeting between the 『Heroine』 and 『Cordelia』 in the game…?!)

In the game, the Heroine was nervous since it hadn't been long since her debut, she saw a beautiful lady... or rather 『Cordelia』 and went to her to ask for advice, but had failed, so 『Cordelia』 became enraged.

Cordelia wasn't just angry at the Heroine's rude behaviour, but she was also angry that the Heroine had interrupted while she was talking to Sylvester and waiting for a chance to ask him to dance, but because of her anger, Sylvester invited the 『Heroine』 to dance to protect her from 『Cordelia』 and poured oil into the fire.

(In the game, Earl Clydereine only told her to 『Have fun』, and it made no mentions of whose evening party it was... No way, it happened at this one!?)

To add to that, the in-game 『Cordelia』 wanted to dance with the Prince, but that didn't mean she had danced with him.

And above all, the 『Heroine's』 — — — Shelley's eyes didn't show a hint of nervousness or anxiety.

The only thing Cordelia felt from them was hostility towards her.

(Is she perhaps trying to recreate the scene without changing a single word...?)

I still don't know what her 『Dreamer Power』 is. But she's trying to make me angry ——— no, she's trying to 『reveal my true personality』 since she's saying those words at a time like this.

In any case, I don't want it to develop into a quarrel. My goal right now is to leave this place. However, I might appear humble if I say my name just like she wants.

(It can't be helped...)

Cordelia reasoned and smiled at Shelley.

“It's been a while, Shelley-sama. Have you forgotten who I am?”

“... Huh?”

“It's been two years, but I'm Cordelia. We've talked before. Cordelia Enna Pameradia. I've grown up now, so please treat me well.”

I don't want her to treat me well, but I'm not going to go along with the scenario in her head.

When Shelley heard Cordelia's words, she widened her eyes and said in a small voice, “No way...” She had said it so quietly that the other people around them couldn't hear her, but Cordelia heard it clearly.

Cordelia turned to Sylvester and Vernoux and curtsied.

“Then, please excuse me. Your Highness and Vernoux-sama.”

Cordelia left after she said that.

The timing was great. It wasn't unnatural for her to leave, and Shelley's interruption made it easier for her to leave. However, she couldn't feel relieved. If anything, she felt down.

(All the actors are here.)

However, I don't plan on following the script. She must have dreamed of the in-game 『Cordelia』 judging by how she acted.

(Shelley thinks that 『Cordelia』 will harm His Highness because of her dreamer power. If her dreams are in line with the game scenario, then there's a chance that she will continue to do the same thing.)

If so, then I should be able to evade her since my personality is different from 『Cordelia's』. I can't predict the weather or find lost things like Shelley, but I know the scenario, so our conditions are even.

(Instead of getting in my way, it would be better for her to leave me alone and improve herself to increase her chances of being acknowledged by His Highness.)

When I had talked to Vernoux-sama before, he had mentioned how people thought of her and about her rumours, but he didn't say that there was a problem with her etiquette. So, Earl Clydereine must have done his best to get her to stand on the same start line as the in-game 『Heroine』. If that's the case, then it's wiser for her to observe the situation than deliberately act stupid in front of Sylvester-sama.

At least, I didn't want to dance with him, and I was going to back down without her interruption.

(I might not need a strategy if it's like this. However, I can't let my guard down since I don't know what she's planning on doing.)

Even if it's avoidable, if she's approaching me, then I feel like another bothersome incident will happen. Even if this is different from the game, I realised that Shelley and I are incompatible once again.

It was a coincidence that I had met her tonight at the evening party, but I was able to confirm a few things. As a result, I can only accept it.

I'll treat it as a harvest, Cordelia thought.

◆◆◆◆◆

Vernoux came outside when Cordelia was getting a carriage arranged.

“Are you alright? It looked like she pulled you pretty hard.”

“Thank you for your concern. Fortunately, I'm fine since she doesn't seem that powerful.”

“I see. Are you going home now?”

“Yes.”

It was a shame that she couldn't talk to Viscountess Gunnell, but it would be better if she sent a letter to her later. If Shelley were to cling to Cordelia by Sylvester's side, then it would be bad in many ways.

Vernoux, who didn't seem like he was going to return to the hall, was going to accompany Cordelia until her carriage arrived.

“Is it alright for you not to be with His Highness?”

“It’s fine since Clive is there. Besides, I’m a little tired from the crowd, so I’d like a break.”

Cordelia didn’t say anything in particular since Vernoux had said that.

Shelley probably won’t approach Cordelia again since she had been dumbfounded, but it would be a hassle if other guests ask her about the situation. She was thankful for this, but she had to say something to him since he was here.

“I gave you back what I owed for the glass.”

Vernoux widened his eyes a little at Cordelia’s words and shrugged.

“Isn’t it crafty of you to settle it with just that much?”

“How so? I felt even more attention on me than when I danced with Onii-sama. Is it good for His Highness to stand out when he’s incognito?”

“It’s fine. His Highness doesn’t have a fiancée. Even if he doesn’t say it outright, he would need to talk to a lot of ladies to find someone. So that’s part of the reason why he’s doing this.”

“What does that have to do with dancing with me? This isn’t the first time he’d gone incognito at an evening party, right? Why hasn’t he asked another lady to dance with him until now?”

“... Well, the first lady who he dances with might have a big misunderstanding, so he has to be careful. Normally, people don’t have to worry if they’re not adults, but it’s His Highness.”

Vernoux answered Cordelia, who had criticised him, while averting his gaze.

Seeing that, Cordelia raised her eyebrow.

“So, I guess it was convenient that I was there since I wouldn’t misunderstand. It’s the same as receiving a request from you.”

What a sacrifice, Cordelia sighed.

“Don’t get me involved.”

“I won’t stop if you want to appeal yourself to him. Do you want me to support you?”

“Please don’t joke. It’s too much for me to bear.”

“Who’s joking?”

“You are.”

Even if she wasn’t avoiding the Prince, she would be surprised if Sylvester had suddenly talked to her in a situation like that.

However, when she heard that Sylvester was looking for his Queen, she felt that this kingdom was stable enough to not need a political marriage.

It was possible for Sylvester to choose his own partner in the game, but actually, domestic affairs and diplomacy also had to do with who he chose. She heard that there was a lot of turbulence in Dulaus to

the north, so if Sylvester were to choose his own Queen, then she should be happy as a citizen of this kingdom.

“If it’s because of such circumstances, then I feel like I’ll be asked a lot of questions from other ladies in the future.”

“That sounds fun.”

“How does it sound fun?”

Even if Sylvester had chosen Cordelia as his first dance partner to avoid misunderstands, the other people would perceive her as such. If this isn’t denied, then it would be troublesome later. It was something that he had to handle since it could get in the way of him searching for his wife.

“Well, don’t look displeased. His Highness is also worried. If you’re harmed because of him, then he would erase rumours about you following him by inviting you to dance himself. It’s only a small part, but there are people in the political world who like to turn stupid rumours into scandals.”

“... If this is about Shelley-sama, then it isn’t His Highness’s fault. No one could have imagined that she would act eccentrically.”

“Absolutely. But you’re one to talk. I’m glad you’re not feeling down about it.”

“Huh?”

“An unlucky thing happened even though you finally went to an evening party.”

He had said this lightly, but this showed that he was concerned about her like Sylvester was. Cordelia was aware that he had come out here because he was worried about her.

That was why she was taking it slowly.

“Do I look like such a lady?”

“No.”

“Argh, please say yes even if it’s a lie.”

“You don’t seem like such a lady because you talk back like that.”

Cordelia also shrugged.

“Fortunately, I didn’t feel any danger to my life today... I feel that I shouldn’t get involved with her and increase the number of people who would believe me instead of her.”

“Danger to your life, you say...? That sounds very dangerous.”

Vernoux used a light tone because he had taken it as a joke, but it wasn’t a joke to Cordelia.

(I didn’t feel that she could do something like that today... But, 『Cordelia』 was also the same at the start.)

『Cordelia』 didn’t doubt that the Heroine would withdraw, and she didn’t pick her means because she believed in her own justice until she lost her life. I’m sure Shelley is the same.

(I hope that things continue as they are as long as I don't get provoked by her...)

The game 『Heroine』 bounced back from her failure and learnt proper etiquette after her problem with 『Cordelia』. However, there were several times when the Heroine was unlucky and had screwed up in front of 『Cordelia』 causing her to get angry, but it wasn't that much. On the other hand, 『Cordelia』 grew impatient since the 『Heroine』 was getting close to Sylvester and meddled with her even though she didn't need to.

However, I don't think that Shelley would understand even after a few incidents. If so, then I need to stay away from Shelley as much as I can... and I have to be extra careful when Sylvester-sama is around.

She thought, then realised that she had ignored something.

“Say, Vernoux-sama, can I ask you something?”

“What is it?”

“You said politics... so does that mean that Otou-sama will hear about this...?”

“Well, he'll probably hear. But the Earl isn't someone who would be troubled even if he faced the other way, so he probably sorted it out himself.”

“Is that so? I'm sorry for troubling him.”

She hadn't heard anything about this from Elvis.

Of course, Cordelia couldn't do anything since she had been in Weltoria fief until recently, but it was still painful.

“No, I think it's rather convenient for him? The people who are trying to find fault with you are desperately searching for flaws even if you're not here. The Earl is properly psyched up if someone says bad things about his daughter.”

“... Is that a good thing?”

Cordelia was worried about Elvis because he could harm his health if he got too psyched up, but she decided that he wouldn't go that far.

And she was thankful to Elvis for protecting her without her noticing.

Act 60: Determination Intensify

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Thank you patrons for this chapter /o/

Seven days after her encounter with Sylvester and Shelley at the night party.

Cordelia invited Clifton to her store after it had closed.

“I’m sorry about this.”

“Don’t worry about it. I have a lot of time.”

Cordelia didn’t need to rush since the other employees went home early because they had the day off tomorrow. Instead, Cordelia was worried about how a man would choose a present. She also wanted to know how he would react to small accessories he wasn’t used to seeing and what kind of set up would make it easier for men to browse through them.

“Please take your time. There are a lot of accessories and miscellaneous goods.”

“I’ll take you at your word.”

Clifton said, then started looking through the shelves.

“What’s this flat can?”

“That is hand cream to prevent rough hands. There are samples too.”

Clifton took an appropriate amount from the container that Cordelia had held out and looked at it curiously as he spread it on his hands.

“This is also scented, isn’t it?”

“Because it’s our selling point. There are products without scents as well, but those who come here will still choose this kind of product.”

“This is...?”

“It’s nail polish. It doesn’t have any scent, but it’s a little unusual in this kingdom. Please wait a moment.”

She said as she painted the sample onto her own nails.

“You put it on your nails like this. This coral colour is preferred by those who wear bold colours.”

“I feel like I understand somehow. Doesn’t Countess Weltoria like it too?”

“Yes, she does.”

However, Clifton’s gaze moved onto the next item, so it seemed like the person he liked didn’t like to wear bold things.

Items such as cosmetics, cameos, cosmetic boxes and jewellery boxes weren't very interesting for him, and Clifton passed through them half-hearted. Then, he finally stopped at the corner.

"What's this flower? It's a beautiful vase, but... did you put the bulb into it directly?"

"Yes, this is a sample, but it's a flower that grows easily with just the bulbs soaked in water. You can watch over the growth of the flower every day without worrying. The semi-transparent ball below that is the fertiliser."

"Oh, it's beautiful."

"This is a major flower in Weltoria. Even in the royal capital, they could be grown in any season, and there's a lot of colours."

It was a flower similar to hyacinth, but unlike hyacinth, it can bloom even if the bulb was completely soaked in water, or even if it was placed slightly slanted. Cordelia thought that this stubborn flower was similar to Nirupama somewhat. It was fun for Cordelia to grow delicate flowers like hyacinth and check on their growth, but nothing fit better than this flower for ladies who weren't interested in growing flowers in the first place.

Clifton pondered for a while then walked away from that shelf. He seemed to have considered the flower, but he hadn't made up his mind.

Cordelia continued to guide him in the store while explaining things, and Clifton tilted his head curiously when he saw one product.

"What kind of design is this?"

"This is a water clock."

"Water clock? It looks like liquid for an hourglass, but... does it not need air?"

The liquid glass container that Clifton was holding was divided into an upper and lower portion. The lower portion contained a thick blue liquid, but other than that, it looked like normal water.

"Please turn it over once."

"Like this?"

When Clifton turned over the water clock, the blue liquid in the portioned section began to slip through the slight gap like a drop and into the transparent water. When it fell through the portioned section, it slid on the surface, fell through the gap again and began to gather.

"This is... water?"

"To be more precise, it's an oil clock."

"But, it's just like water. Amazing. These are all the colours it comes in?"

"Yes. It's an elaborate design, so the prices vary, but it's a very popular produce so we're a bit out of stock."

Clifton liked the water clock better than the flower. He turned it over and examined it.

“I thought I’ve collected a lot of items that have to do with water, but this is the first time I’ve seen something like this.”

“If you don’t mind, I’d be happy if you promote it even if you don’t give it as a gift.”

“By any chance, did you also think of this, Cordelia-san?”

Clifton shrugged when she only replied with a smile.

“As expected of you. I wish you’d share a little of your business skills with me.”

“Please stop flattering me, I’ll get carried away.”

“I wish it was flattering, I wonder if I lose to you in business skills as well.”

“Oh my, I would like to ask for your cooperation.”

“It’s amazing to see that you’re already so experienced since you could say things like that. Alright. I’ll ask you the same.”

Cordelia and Clifton both smiled a little.

“Now then, what do you think? I can see that you like the oil clock.”

“Well, she likes things to do with the sea and water. I think she’ll be happy with cosmetics too, but I’m not too sure.”

“The sea and water...?”

Cordelia drew her eyebrows together at those words.

The water clock might be good since it was associated with water too. But she felt that Clifton could prepare something that would be even more surprising since his family’s business was related to marine trade. And that was what Cordelia wanted in a new product as well.

“Um, Cordelia-san?”

“Clifton-sama. In that case, I think a storm glass would be better.”

A storm glass was an instrument made out of a liquid sealed in a glass and the liquid was crystallised. It was a tool for predicting the weather in a few hours. It was made from chemicals like camphor in her previous life, but in this world, it was a kind of magic tool.

“You and Myles-sama might be familiar with it since you both do marine trade, but it’s rare for people who aren’t familiar with ships, and I think it’s quite fun to watch the crystals lose their shape and form again every day.”

“Really...? But the shape is a little... It’s not a gift if it’s ship equipment.”

“Yes. Therefore, if you’re giving it as a gift, then it’ll only be used for enjoyment. So, it’s fine to put the contents into a pretty glass container.

“Huh?”

“It doesn’t need to be exact. Since it’s not like she’ll go on a sea voyage. For example, how about putting it in a sphere or cone shaped glass container?”

Clifton groaned at her suggestion.

“I never thought of that. But it’s a good idea to try out. Can I see it if you make the prototype?”

“Yes, of course. But there’s one more thing I would like to ask.”

“What is it?”

“If it goes well and it looks like I can commercialise it, then please let me sell it here.”

Clifton widened his eyes at her words, then laughed.

“Cordelia-san, I feel relieved that you’re already thinking about it. I’m glad I talked to you. Thanks.”

“No, thank you.”

Clifton purchased hand cream to gift to his mother and left the shop. Cordelia saw him off with a smile. She sincerely hoped that the gift would be completed and that it would work out between Clifton and the lady he was interested in.

“Now, shall I clean up and go home?”

She finally had the day off tomorrow.

She wasn’t competing with Clifton, who will be working on designing his gift for the girl he likes, but Cordelia was a bit excited since she wanted to create something to gift to the employees, who worked at the store, to thank them.

◆◆◆◆◆

Using the shop’s regular day off, Cordelia created nail care cream.

As long as one worked, there was a chance that the nail polish would get chipped, but if they had nail care cream, then the servants wouldn’t be too worried about chipping it.

I hope they will be proactive because of the scent. Cordelia prepared the finished product for distribution.

The next day, Cordelia was planning on visiting Fulvia and going to the café that had opened up for the masses, so she showed up at 『Cordelia’s Fragrance』 before the shop opened.

Everyone who was preparing to open the shop was very happy with the nail care cream, so Cordelia felt relieved. *If they’re like this, then Kaylie-sama, who is in the back, will be happy too* ——— she thought as she headed to where Kaylie was, however Kaylie was in the room by herself and her shoulders quivered in surprise when Cordelia called out to her.

“I’m sorry for surprising you.”

“I-it’s fine...”

It was meant to be a greeting, but Kaylie looked away from Cordelia and shook her head.

(It’s like when we first met... She seems kind of nervous...?)

Cordelia felt like Kaylie had opened up to her quite a lot from their conversation the other day, so she had no idea why she went back to her distant attitude.

“Are you perhaps not feeling well?”

“N-no, hmm... it’s nothing...”

However, Cordelia couldn’t accept what Kaylie had said.

“Excuse me for a bit.”

“Wah?!”

“You don’t... have a fever.”

Kaylie’s forehead temperature which was transmitted through the hand that she had placed there felt quite normal.

However, even if she didn’t have a fever, there might be a part of her which Cordelia couldn’t feel that wasn’t feeling well such as a stomach-ache or feeling sluggish. She had regular days off on top of the days she got off when the shop was closed, but she was a lady, and this is her first job. She might be unable to relax.

“Kaylie-sama, please take a day off today. You might be feeling fatigued since you work so hard.”

“No... It really is nothing. However, um...”

“Umm?”

“No, it’s, nothing...”

Cordelia frowned at Kaylie who kept mumbling her words. Kaylie wasn’t good at lying.

“Then, I’ll believe you. However, please tell me if it gets really bad. I’m worried that you would faint.”

“Th-thank you very much...”

However, she couldn’t meet Cordelia’s eyes even though she had said that.

Cordelia wondered what the heck was going on, but if Cordelia stayed for too long, then it could put more pressure on Kaylie. *I’ll let the other employees know that she isn’t feeling well and let them keep an eye on her.*

Cordelia thought, and recalled that she had come here to give Kaylee something.

“Kaylie-sama, please take this.”

“Huh?”

“I just gave this to everyone just now. It’s cream for nail care. I’ll be happy if you like the fragrance as well.”

“Th... thank you very much.”

Kaylie seemed surprised, but she carefully picked up the container with the cream.

(I’m glad. It doesn’t seem like she hates working here.)

It pained Cordelia to think that Kaylie actually hated working here and was just being considerate. So, she was relieved that that didn’t seem to be the case.

“H-hmm...”

“What’s wrong?”

“How was... the evening party?”

“The evening party?”

A lot of time has already passed before she asked me about it, Cordelia thought while tilting her head in confusion. She was planning on attending a few evening parties soon, but she has only been to Myles’s one in the past.

“No, hmm, umm... I’m sorry for asking something strange.”

“No. But, it’s just... a lot of things happened, and I don’t know where to start... Kaylie-sama, did you hear some rumours?”

“Ah, hmm... I’m sorry, I don’t listen to rumours. But I was just wondering if you were on good terms with Gunnel-sama and Hack-sama.”

“Eh? With Myles-sama and Clifton-sama?”

Cordelia blinked her eyes at Kaylie’s unexpected question.

“I met them at Hazel-sama’s birthday party when I was younger. I was also nervous so I’m really glad that I knew a lot of people at my first evening party.”

If Kaylie hadn’t heard the rumours, then she didn’t have to forcefully talk about Sylvester and Shelley. Kaylie will most likely misunderstand if she talked about Sylvester, and Cordelia didn’t want her to feel distressed by talking about Shelley since the Clydereine House had given her family a loan.

However, when Kaylie heard Cordelia’s reply, she spoke in a gloomy voice, “I see...” Cordelia couldn’t think of why she was acting like this, but she was worried about leaving Kaylie alone.

“Kaylie-sama. If you feel alright tomorrow, why don’t you go out with me?”

“Eh?”

“I’m going to develop a range of products that we can sell to commoners, and I’m also setting it up in a corner of the café I run. I’m going to prepare for it, but let’s also get fresh air by visiting the mobile library office and eating sweets.”

“... Thank you very much, Cordelia-sama.”

Kaylie smiled apologetically and accepted, and Cordelia felt relieved.

The next day, Kaylie, who had gone out with her, seemed reserved, but she had hidden her anxiety. Still, Cordelia was concerned about whether she was really sick yesterday or if she had acted like that because of something else.

Cordelia, who had been living hectically, received evening party invitations from her regulars and from women who she met from Nirupama, and was gradually showing up to them.

One day, Hazel came into the store.

Cordelia guided her to the small room at the back of the store. Different from the workshop and warehouse, this room was used for business discussions and to entertain special guests.

“I heard, Cordelia-sama. People are calling you the 『Queen of Flowers』 these days.”

“Those rumours... I’m not happy with them to be honest.”

“Oh, but everyone is calling you that with pure respect.”

“I’m also very grateful for that, but...”

The end of that sentence was “I want them to take it a little easy on me.”

The evening parties where the young and older women interacted became a great place for her to advertise her commodity, and Cordelia was surrounded by a lot of women each time, to the point that she couldn’t move. And she began being called what Hazel had just said earlier, 『Queen of Flowers』 .

They had probably given her this title because of the essential oils and the plant magic that her Pameradia House was famous for, but it was an exaggeration. If possible, she wanted a cuter nickname.

“Next time, I’ll have to go and see how the 『Queen of Flowers』 is doing.”

“Please don’t make fun of me anymore.”

Of course, she was happy that they appreciated her and were interested in her products. Even more so if they love the products.

“But I thought it was strange when I saw the women in the shop. There are a lot of women who use various kinds of balms and perfumes, but the fragrances don’t seem to mix together very much.”

“That’s because of magic.”

If the different fragrances mixed together, then people could choke from the smell. Therefore, Cordelia cast magic on the cosmetics in the store.

For example, she cast magic on the ingredients that would become the base of the cosmetics so that it would pull back the scent and not drift too far away if there were other scents nearby. Each base repelled other fragrances in the air like a magnet. At the same time, she also cast magic that regulated the concentration so that the fragrance wouldn’t suddenly become stronger for the consumer. If the scent suddenly became stronger, then it might agitate the consumer’s throat and nose.

(It wasn’t easy to come up with the magic for this, but I’m really glad that there’s magic in this world.)

Cordelia was grateful from the bottom of her heart for being born into a house where she could use such magic. It was fun to think about the combinations of things she could do because of her previous

life magic and what she couldn't do if she didn't have magic in this world, even more so when things went well.

(However, I want to also talk about the interests of the ladies who I don't know... I wonder if I can do this when things settle down a bit more.)

It was possible for her to take a peek at the lady's interests from the questions that were asked, but she had already made most of those products. If she wanted to make something new, then she would have to talk to the ladies more.

"By the way, Cordelia-sama. How is the search for your fated partner?"

"Uoah, fated, you say?"

"Oh my, are you upset?"

Hazel looked at her in amusement because of her immediate reply, and Cordelia lightly coughed.

She had certainly gone to evening parties with that intention in mind, but it wasn't going well. Since people started calling her the 『Queen of Flowers』, it wasn't easy for her to find the time to talk to men. Sometimes men would come to talk to her when the women gave her a break, but most of the time, they came to talk about business.

(Well, it might be possible for us to get close with the arrangements afterwards...)

Cordelia appreciated receiving information about business, and they might be useful to Elvis. The situation wasn't bad when she thought of it like that, but those discussions were far away from one of her original goals which was searching for a marriage partner.

However, Cordelia wasn't in a rush yet. Fortunately, the age for marriage in this world was wide.

(I'm going to spend the rest of my life with them, so my partner isn't someone who I can decide in a rush.)

Of course, she was actively increasing the number of places where she could meet such a person, but even if she met them, she didn't know how their feelings would be reciprocated afterwards.

"I'm taking my time to think about it."

Some men have offered her individual business deals. She might find out something if she talked to them through that.

"Cordelia-sama... I understand how you feel."

"Huh? Th-thank you very much..."

Even though I hadn't said anything, did my feelings get across to her?

Cordelia tilted her head in wonder and Hazel strongly gripped her fist.

"Because, how the hell was Shelley-sama's head made?! I've heard a lot of ridiculous things! It's natural that you wouldn't be able to concentrate if someone like that is around!"

Hazel shouted in anger, and Cordelia understood that there was a difference in what she was thinking and what Hazel was thinking. Cordelia smiled dryly since she felt like she could feel the burning smoke ooze out from Hazel.

“Well... The real harm hasn’t gotten that big yet.”

“Just because it isn’t big, she’s still putting it out there! What the hell are those guys who are attending to her thinking?! I can’t believe she did something rude to you!”

“Please calm down, Hazel-sama.”

Cordelia had attended five evening parties since she went to the Gunnell’s evening party.

It wasn’t necessary to express that one was attending an evening party since it wasn’t a dinner party, so Cordelia didn’t tell the host that she was attending unless she was close to them, and she didn’t tell others that she was attending either. By all rights, it was impossible for someone to know in advance that she would be attending an evening party, but Cordelia has encountered Shelley twice so far.

Hazel wasn’t with Cordelia both times, but she must have heard rumours about Shelley.

(It’s possible to think of it as a coincidence since I only encountered her two times out of five. However, it was a different story if I think that the evening parties she chose were from hosts who didn’t get along with the Clydereine House.)

The hosts also welcomed Cordelia since they knew about the interactions between her and Shelley, but the moment they saw Shelley, they would have an indescribable expression on their faces. When she saw that, she guessed that they hadn’t invited Shelley and that she had been brought there by someone.

(If she were told this in her dreams, then that’s a dangerous ability.)

Cordelia had greatly miscalculated because she expected that all of Shelley’s dreams were wrong when it came to dreams about herself.

However, Cordelia didn’t suffer from any big disadvantages even though it was a little unpleasant. Rather, Cordelia raised her reputation as a calm lady since she forgot and forgave every time Shelley threw verbal abuse at her and acted improper as a lady from a noted House.

(Even if I don’t count the thing that happened at the Viscount Gunnell’s evening party, she would step on the hem of my dress and not apologise, or run straight into me, so her friends were probably distancing themselves from her as well.)

Shelley’s friends felt that she threw tantrums because of her paranoia, and burst out in anger, then they would start avoiding her to get away from that. It would be very unpleasant for a normal lady if there were thought to have the same emotions as Shelley.

Maybe because that had happened, the ladies who had close relations to the Clydereine House have started to approach Cordelia and there was no trace of them contacting Shelley again afterwards. They had probably given up on her. But there were still people beside her because of her 『Dream Power』.

“Cordelia-sama, you should get angry when you need to be. Otherwise, she will think that you won’t get angry no matter what she does.”

“Thank you for your concern. But, do you think she would listen to what I say?”

“That’s... well, it seems like it would be difficult for her to do so.”

Hazel hadn’t thought of that and put her hand on her temple.

“Besides, if Shelley-sama goes into a frenzy, then she might do something unexpected. Why don’t we wait a little longer?”

“Argh, rather than too calm, you’re too laid back, Cordelia-sama... But if she tears your dress, then I don’t care what you want, I’ll punish her.”

“I don’t think she would do that...”

If Shelley were to reach that level of violence, then Cordelia would avoid her or resist her, but she didn’t think that would happen. Shelley couldn’t do that without bringing a dangerous weapon with her.

Until now, Shelley stepping on the hem of Cordelia’s dress and bumping into her were events in the game. These were events that happened after the 『Heroine』 meet 『Cordelia』, and had actually happened.

However, Cordelia didn’t know when Shelley would appear. She didn’t think the game went into that much detail about the 『Heroine』, but even if it did, Cordelia wouldn’t have known since she was a light gamer.

“However, Shelley-sama doesn’t act very strange outside of places where she meets me, and I don’t hear any weird rumours about her either... It’s very strange that she gets like that in front of me.”

Even at the Viscount’s evening party, Cordelia felt like Shelley was trying to force the events of her dream, and her actions against Cordelia were her overdoing things. Stepping on her dress and running into her were things that wouldn’t have happened had Shelley not forcefully done so. Cordelia knew that there was an event in the game where Shelley stepped on her dress, but she didn’t know that there was an event where Shelley ran into her. If she had to guess, then there was an event where the Heroine pulled the accessories in Cordelia’s hair, but that wasn’t a body slam, and that event didn’t collide with the event where she stepped on Cordelia’s dress.

However, it could have happened on routes that Cordelia hadn’t played, and it was also possible that these events had nothing to do with the game and were things that had happened in Shelley’s dreams. Either way, Cordelia wasn’t short-tempered enough to go against Shelley’s malicious actions.

(In the first place, the 『Heroine』 hadn’t perfected her manners yet when she showed up in high society because she was taking things easy at the Cylderine House. That’s why she angered 『Cordelia』 ... I wonder if Shelley is trying to re-enact the scenes between the 『Heroine』 and 『Cordelia』 from the game since she acts normally in front of everyone except me.)

Shelley behaved like a proper noble without any problems except for when she was in front of Cordelia so she may have taken her mannerism classes more seriously than the 『Heroine』. It was astonishing, and if she had done that for Sylvester, then it was something to admire. However, her absolute attachment to her dreams which made her efforts go to waste couldn’t simply be removed.

(Even so, some young ladies were rethinking their relationship with her.)

If that's the case, then it isn't all that bad to leave Shelley-sama alone. I was only harmed slightly, and most of that harm was actually returned to her. Shelley-sama's reputation will fall if I leave her alone, and if this were to reach Earl Clydereine's ears, then he might do something about it.

She thought as Hazel raged next to her.

"I'm sure she just wants to show other people that she has the upper hand."

Of course, Hazel probably wouldn't believe that Shelley's actions were based on her dreams.

"... If she acts that way towards me because of some kind of belief, then she might be happy that she has met someone whom she reacts that strongly towards."

"Cordelia...?"

"But the current situation isn't something to be praised."

"That's true. Most people are soft-hearted."

Then, Hazel sighed. Cordelia knew that Hazel was really worried about her and felt apologetic.

(Honestly, it's still fine as long as Shelley's reputation goes down, but it's not good if people think I'm some kind of trouble.)

She didn't know when Shelley would stop attacking her and needed to find a way to avoid her.

"Then, let's go refresh ourselves!"

"Excuse me?"

"My relatives are the Harshi House. The evening party is a place for my aunt and uncle to meet people they know, but aunt always said that she wanted to talk to you. Won't you come for me as well?"

Cordelia blinked her eyes in surprise when she heard that name.

She had greeted Earl Harshi and his family during her coming of age ceremony, but it was also a name that Nirupama had a strong rivalry with when Cordelia was twelve. By the way, she remembered Nirupama smiling widely when she said that name.

"I would love to if I'm invited."

"Thank you very much. Oh yes, I'll invite Kaylie-sama as well. Let's go have fun!"

"Yes. But, Kaylie-sama doesn't like evening parties very much..."

"There will be times when she needs to go to them from now on. It's a small party, and it's a good event for her to get used to them! I'm sure it'll be fun."

Hazel had already decided that Kaylie would be attending. Cordelia confusingly remembered Kaylie and felt that she wouldn't be able to refuse, not because Kaylie lost to Hazel's assertiveness, but because she knew that she would need to get used to attending evening parties.



The day of the evening party.

She received a letter stating that Hazel would be going to get Kaylie first, so she wanted Cordelia to go there by herself. 『I'm going to fix Kaylie-sama's makeup! She's hiding her lovely face!』, Hazel had written.

(The fact that Kaylie-sama has her face hidden means that her bangs are still long even though she's dressed up?)

They had solved the 『Jet Black』 misunderstanding, but she still hid her eyes with her hair because, "I'm used to this so it's embarrassing."

(This should be left to the Hazel sister's temperaments.)

I'm sure they'll make Kaylie-sama pretty so I won't be that meddlesome, she thought as she headed towards the Harshi House.

Cordelia was immediately greeted by the wife when she arrived at the Harshi mansion.

She looked gorgeous and strong-willed, as expected of someone who could compete with Nirupama.

"It's been a while, Cordelia-san. I'm so happy you can be here today."

"I'm honoured to hear that you had invited me through Hazel-sama."

"No way. I wanted to ask you a favour, so I'm grateful that you have come."

"You wanted to ask a favour?"

Contrary to her words, she was talking in a fairly open place.

The wife smiled when Cordelia tilted her head in confusion.

"I've heard that the Pameradia House has a really nice bathhouse. Can I visit?"

"Excuse me? If you want to, then with pleasure."

Maybe she'll be interested in footbaths too? And saying it's a 『nice bathhouse』 instead of a 『bathhouse』 sounds as if she had heard it from someone else.

"Thank you very much. To tell you the truth, the servants at my house said that they heard from the people working at your house that you have a very nice bathhouse. Apparently, the bath you use is lovely, but I heard that the bath that the servants use is lovely as well."

Cordelia deeply thanked the servants who were her testers and smiled.

"Our bathhouse is used as a place for testers to try out products. Our magicians put a lot of work into constructing the facility, so please take your time to enjoy it."

"Thank you very much. Then, please talk to me more about it later."

“Yes.”

But is it alright to end the conversation here? Cordelia thought that the conversation ended a lot faster than she thought it was and was curious. Then, the wife hid her mouth with her fan.

“Say, Cordelia-san. I’d like to say something selfish, but... Can we have tea after I’m done looking around?”

Cordelia also got her point when the wife said that. *I see, she wants to secretly talk more then.*

“Yes, of course.”

“Thank you again.”

She thought that the conversation had ended this time, but she heard what the wife said as she whispered into her fan.

“See that, Nirupama. I can talk to Cordelia-san!”

She somehow understood that she was competing against her aunt for some reason.

They have a really good relationship, Cordelia desperately tried to hold down her laughter. *I’m sure their personalities are similar.*

“Cordelia-san, please take your time. There’s no rude people here, so please have fun.”

The bitter words that she had uttered while smiling was also heard by those close by. The word 『take your time』 seemed to have influenced those around them, and there weren’t any crowds around Cordelia like usual. However, that didn’t mean that people weren’t interested in her. Their eyes flickered towards her, but they didn’t approach her because of what the wife had said. Cordelia had to go talk to them herself.

Cordelia didn’t see Hazel or Kaylie after she had finished talking to Countess Harshi, but she did find Clifton.

“Good afternoon, Clifton-sama. How is the progress of your gift?”

“Ahaha, that’s sudden.”

Clifton hadn’t contacted her even since she gave him the proposal, and it seemed like he was a little worried about it since he had averted his gaze.

“To tell you the truth, even if I had completed the prototype, it was a bit different from how I imagined it and wasn’t going well, but I’ve finally got it to the point where I’m satisfied. I found out that it was that difficult to make something that you want to make.”

“But it’ll be a wonderful gift since you’ve put so much thought into it.”

“I hope that’s true.”

He looked calm, contrary to his unconfident words. It seemed like he had finished it to his satisfaction. Cordelia was happy as if it was something for her when she heard this.

“What attracted you to the woman you like?”

“You’re asking that?”

“Just out of curiosity. I helped you out a little, so isn’t it fine to tell me a bit?”

Looking at Clifton’s attitude, he seemed shy, but he didn’t dislike being asked.

“Because she’s calm, I guess? She doesn’t talk much, so even though we’ve been together since we were little, it’s not like we talk a lot... How do I say this, we understand each other even if we don’t put it into words, hmm, or we can guess what the other person is thinking...?”

“Oh my, it sounds like you two are already a married couple.”

“No, well... I can’t guess what she’s thinking, so I don’t think it’s the same.”

“But you really like her, don’t you? It makes me feel a little embarrassed when I see how you’re acting.”

Clifton panicked a little at Cordelia’s honest words, but then he coughed and spoke calmly again.

“How do I say this, rather than liking her, I just think it’s better for us to be together. My heart doesn’t race around her, but it does feel warm...”

“Your heart doesn’t throb for her?”

“Well, it’s not like it doesn’t... Somehow, it’s not like that...”

Cordelia tilted her head in confusion at Clifton since he wasn’t being clear.

Cordelia hadn’t experienced her first love yet, and didn’t have any love stories to proudly tell, but she thought love was something that made your heart pound. However, listening to Clifton, she knew for certain that he was in love.

“... Love is difficult, isn’t it?”

Clifton laughed at Cordelia’s honest words.

“It doesn’t suit you to say that, Cordelia-san.”

“What do you mean? Are you saying that love doesn’t suit me?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying. You always look like you have leeway, and don’t look like you would worry over something.”

Cordelia wanted to repeat his words back at him when he said that, but she held back.

Including Clifton-sama, it isn’t a bad thing for me to be seen like that by others. In fact, there are many times when I hesitate and think a lot, but it’s better to be seen that way when it came to negotiations.

Cordelia thought and smiled.

“Oh my, isn’t it ominous to be a veteran at love when I’ve only just made my debut?”

“No, yes. You’re certainly right. It’s scary for you to say it like that.”

“Of course, I’m joking.”

“So, you do have leeway. I have to learn from you.”

They looked at each other and laughed, then Cordelia saw Hazel at the corner of her eyes and slightly raised her right hand. Hazel immediately noticed Cordelia. She spoke to Kaylie, who was with her, and approached Cordelia.

Kaylie had her bangs swept to the side, and her eyes, which were normally hidden, could be seen clearly. Her image changed quite a lot with just that, but the gentle, but gorgeous dress that she was wearing made her look bewitching.

“Kaylie-sama, you look beautiful.”

Hazel had said she would make some changes, but Cordelia thought it was nice if she could see Kaylie’s face on a regular basis, then a voice spoke.

“... After all, huh, Kaylie, is that you?”

“Eh?”

“You know Kaylie, Cordelia-san?”

Cordelia looked at Clifton because she didn’t know why he had asked that, and his face looked quite flushed. He didn’t look like the same person who had spoken calmly before ——.

“Perhaps, is the person who you like 『Jet Black』?”

“Wh, er, why.”

“You don’t have to panic that much. Don’t worry, I won’t tell her.”

“Huh? Eh, hmm, Cordelia-san? What do you mean?”

“Let’s talk about that later. For the time being, it will seem unnatural if you don’t do something about your expression.”

Cordelia wanted to tell him straight away, but she was afraid of saying it in front of Kaylie.

However, Kaylie widened her eyes when she was approaching Cordelia and Clifton, then she suddenly turned around and ran away.

“Huh? Kaylie-sama?”

Hazel was surprised, and Cordelia immediately passed her.

When Cordelia passed Hazel, she said, “I’d like to talk to her alone for a bit,” then chased after Kaylie. Hazel was surprised by Cordelia’s sudden words, but she remained puzzled since she couldn’t grasp the situation and didn’t reply.

But Cordelia didn’t have time to explain. Hazel was facing them, so she didn’t realise, but Kaylie looked shocked before she turned around and ran away. It hadn’t shown, but Cordelia thought she might have had tears in her eyes as well.

(I don't think she hates Clifton-sama so much that she didn't want to meet him.)

If so, then it is that embarrassing to show her hair up to someone she knows? No, that can't be it... I don't want to think about it, but I have a bad feeling about this.

There were a couple people taking a break in the courtyard that Kaylie went to.

“Kaylie-sama, what's wrong?”

“I'm sorry, but, I'm okay...”

“That's not convincing when you look like that.”

Cordelia said, then held out a handkerchief for Kaylie. Kaylie took it with both hands and covered her face.

“I knew... But it's different when I have to see it... Clifton-sama and Cordelia-sama... Hmm, do you not realise it Cordelia-sama...? That Clifton-sama, likes....”

(His face caused a big misunderstanding after all...!)

Cordelia didn't know if she couldn't say it until the end because she was being considerate of Clifton or because she couldn't say it. However, her words told Cordelia enough.

“Why do you think he does?”

“Clifton-sama's face when he was with you a while ago... Did you not see it, Cordelia-sama?”

(I saw it, but that's definitely because he saw you.)

She wanted to say but held back.

She wasn't the person who should say that, Clifton had to tell Kaylie himself.

Cordelia pretended not to know anything, and Kaylie continued.

“When Clifton-sama first met you at an evening party, he told me that he had met a wonderful lady...”

“Wasn't it just because we just happened to talk? At that time, I had only greeted him when he was with Myles-sama.”

“But... at that time, he was nervous and couldn't calm down... He had never told me something like that before... But since the other person is you... I understand.”

(I'm sure he was telling her that it was more reassuring to be with her than me.)

“So, I... also wish I could know more about you... This was after you'd left the royal capital, but I was also involved with the mobile library. When I heard about you from Hazel-sama, I thought I could see you up close...”

“...”

“But the more I knew you, the more I noticed that we’re very different. To make matters worse, I... my house... is in a tough situation. You told me that the 『Jet Black』 thing was a misunderstanding... but even if that’s excluded, I can’t...”

Cordelia felt that Kaylie’s evaluation of her had been too high since long ago, but how could she have imagined that this was the cause? Then, Cordelia began to feel that there was nothing she could do about this.

“I’m going to go call Clifton-sama.”

“Huh...?”

“Please talk with him.”

“B-but...”

“Kaylie-sama, believe in yourself more.”

“But...”

“No buts. You can clearly see your surroundings with your hair up like this right? And, even if it is like you had imagined, you still need to talk to him directly if you haven’t given up.”

Kaylie-sama should know this.

However, she didn’t answer Cordelia.

Cordelia handed Kaylie the aroma stone can that she had hidden in her sleeves.

“This is a charm. Please calm down with this by the time Clifton-sama comes, it’s made from roses and lavender.”

“Eh...”

Orange with geranium, lavender with rose otto, and patchouli with sandalwood had a relaxing effect.

“I actually wanted you to use this when we were going to come here together. Please use it to change your mood.”

“Is it alright...?”

“Yes, of course.”

Kaylie was puzzled because she knew that Cordelia hadn’t started selling rose essential oils at the shop yet.

“Kaylie-sama. I would like to give you a piece of advice. Please smile while you talk. I’m sure you’ll look more attractive that way. I’m rooting for you.”

Cordelia smiled, and returned to the venue after leaving those words.

In the venue, Clifton was still blushing, and Hazel was teasing him. Hazel was a little confused since Cordelia had returned alone, but Cordelia smiled back at her.

“I’m sorry to keep you waiting, now, Clifton-sama. Quickly go to the courtyard. At this rate, you’ll be misunderstood.”

“Huh?! What, Cordelia-san...?”

“I would like to tell you that half-hearted words can deepen misunderstandings. Kaylie-sama misunderstood and took it the wrong way when you called her 『Jet Black』. Please let her know with your words first rather than give her a present.”

Clifton panicked when he heard Cordelia, but he understood her without her having to explain. He quickly left.

“Thank you, Cordelia-sama.”

“He couldn’t have imagined that he became his own obstacle to love.”

“Oh my, did that happen? I could imagine what was going on from his reaction a while ago and I only saw it once.”

“Maybe there are times when you don’t notice things because you’re too close.”

“But, in the end, Cordelia-sama was also involved in fulfilling their love, so why don’t you take it as it went well?”

“... Well, I’m envious of them.”

However, speaking of misunderstandings, Hazel-sama also misunderstood me before...

It might be difficult to prevent it, but Cordelia decided to listen to those around her as much as possible. *I’m being careful, but I have to be extra careful about my love that will come eventually...* She thought, but was that something she should ask people?

(... Love is difficult after all.)

It doesn’t always make one’s heart pound and it isn’t always calm.

Can I understand those feelings clearly? She thought and felt that it was difficult.

“Say, Cordelia-sama. Can I visit the shop again so that I can hear more about this from Kaylie-sama?”

“Yes, of course. I look forward to seeing you there.”

Cordelia was more concerned about the two who weren’t able to communicate very well with each other rather than her uncertain future.

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The day after the evening party at the Harshi House.

Cordelia showed up at the shop in the afternoon and could tell how yesterday went when their eyes met. Kaylie usually hid her eyes with her bangs, but they were visible today. It was difficult to talk to Kaylie since she was working, but they finally had time to talk after they finished cleaning the shop.

“Cordelia-sama, hmm... Thank you very much.”

“You’re welcome. It looks like you two were able to clear your misunderstandings, I’m glad.”

Kaylie didn’t need to say anymore and smiled.

“Kaylie-sama, did you like yesterday’s fragrance?”

“Ah, yes! I’m going to give it back to you...”

“I don’t mind since I was planning on giving it to you from the start. Actually, this essential oil has the same blend as that fragrance. If you don’t mind, please take it. It’s a thank you present for working so hard.”

“Eh, but...”

“Congratulations.”

Cordelia pushed it towards Kaylie and Kaylie smiled.

“Thank you very much.”

“Please don’t mind. Don’t worry about taking a day off when you go on a date.”

“Eh... h-hmm...”

Cordelia smiled at Kaylie who had turned red.

“More importantly, you must be tired from yesterday. I’ll take you home.”

“Hmm, umm... I’m fine today. I’ll be meeting my mother.”

“You will? In that case, you have to hurry.”

Kaylie probably was in a rush. She rushed out of the room after putting her tools away.

After a while when Cordelia thought about going home too, she noticed a small pouch had been left on the desk.

“Oh my, I wonder if she forgot this.”

She usually only brings this with her, I wonder if she was in that much of a rush? It might not be a problem for her to find it here tomorrow, but she might panic if she thinks she’s dropped it.

“She hasn’t gone far yet, has she?”

I might be able to catch up to her if I chase after her now. Cordelia thought, and asked the female employees, who were cleaning, which way Kaylie went, then headed off in that direction. However, she

couldn't find Kaylie even though the street was wide. She thought she would at least see her figure and concluded that she must have gone in the opposite direction.

As she walked and looked around, a familiar voice entered her ears from a side path.

"Say, was what I said wrong?"

It was Shelley's voice.

Shelley was a noble, so it wasn't odd for her to be here, and her voice wasn't loud and conspicuous, but her irritating and oppressive voice didn't suit this place.

Cordelia secretly peeked into the path, and she saw Shelley and Kaylie.

Shelley was glaring at Kaylie, and Kaylie was looking down a little. Cordelia had heard about their relationship from Hazel, but this was the first time she had seen the two together. And from what she could see from how Kaylie was acting; it was clear that they didn't have a good relationship.

"You told me that you didn't know what evening parties she was attending. But I heard from someone that you were at the same evening party as her. What is the meaning of this?"

"..."

"You told me that you would tell me about her once you got to know her, but you keep insisting that you know nothing about her. You actually know a lot of things about her, don't you?"

She didn't look like a Heroine at all since she got more irritating with every word she said.

(More importantly, does this mean that Shelley coerced Kaylie from the beginning...?)

With Shelley's personality, she probably hounded Kaylie-sama a lot. But, Kaylie-sama still insisted that she didn't know anything.

Then, Kaylie looked up. Shelley was a little surprised by this.

"I don't feel like your words are correct."

Shelley became speechless for a moment because of Kaylie's protest, but she immediately retorted in a strong tone.

"Why did you say that!? That woman will hurt His Highness and cause trouble for everyone, you know?! Don't say it like you're talking from a parent's perspective, that woman...!!"

The enraged Shelley was like the in-game 『Cordelia』.

(Hatred would be the closest feeling that Shelley has towards me.)

However, the words Shelley had said towards Kaylie were outbursts of anger towards Cordelia, and there was no need to drag Kaylie into something troublesome. Kaylie wasn't good at talking, so it was best for Shelley to keep quiet and let her pass. Shelley didn't need to force herself to confront Kaylie, so Cordelia wished she had chosen not to bother Kaylie.

However, Kaylie continued to speak.

“I’ve always admired Cordelia-sama. That’s why I know she can do things that don’t benefit her.”

“I didn’t ask for your opinion. You know that you’re receiving support from the Clydereine House, don’t you?”

“Does that mean that we should immediately return the loan that we had received from Earl Clydereine...?”

“What else would that mean?”

Shelley didn’t realise that this was the same behaviour as Cordelia which she had just mentioned before.

Kaylie quietly stared at Shelley, then nodded.

“Okay.”

“Then——”

“It’s not something I can decide alone. But... I will talk to my parents and ask them if the citizens will forgive us for lending money out until we were tricked. About returning the money, we had to pay the servants’ wages, but you are one-sidedly changing the original contract even though this has nothing to do with it, so I hope you can wait for the money.”

“Does that mean you don’t trust me after all?”

Cordelia started walking when she heard Shelley’s sharp tone.

“Please leave it at that, Shelley-sama.”

“Y-you...!”

“Kaylie-sama, I’m here to deliver something you forgot.”

Kaylie was puzzled at Cordelia who smiled, unfazed by Shelley’s gaze.

Cordelia pushed the pouch onto Kaylie and looked straight at Shelley.

“If you need something from me, then come straight at me. Having cards is also important for negotiations. You look like you’re only threatening her, and I don’t like it.”

“I... I’m not wrong! In the first place... Isn’t it because you’re hiding your true self!? You’re the only person who didn’t turn out like how you were in my dreams...!”

Shelley glared at Cordelia with her face bright red, and Cordelia lightly brushed her off. Cordelia also looked grim since her attitude didn’t match the girl who was rumoured to be the 『Saint』.

“I don’t know what you’re thinking, but it’s wrong for you to blame Kaylie-sama for things such as me attending evening parties.”

“What did you say...?!”

“Shelley-sama. You said before that His Highness is your benefactor and you want to return his favour. It’s your freedom to see me as your enemy, but if you want to be useful to His Highness, then why don’t you do something for him instead of trying to trick and deceive me?”

“That’s why I’m doing this! But, in my dreams, you’re always chasing after His Highness while wearing a red dress! You know what I’m talking about, don’t you...!?”

“I’ve never worn a red dress before in my life.”

Shelley frowned deeper when she heard what Cordelia had said.

“... Remember this, I’m going to expose your true self in front of everyone right now!”

Shelley turned her heel and went back onto the main street.

(I guess it’s pointless since we’re not in front of people right now.)

But it was all the same to Cordelia.

I don’t think Shelley would agree with my advice, and I’d rather she walk away rather than asking the same questions over and over. It wasn’t a clean break, but the result is good if I think about Kaylie-sama’s situation.

Cordelia looked at Kaylie and saw that her expression was stiff.

“I, I was scared...”

Cordelia smiled gently at Kaylie who only seemed scared now.

“Thank you very much. You’ve been protecting me all this time.”

“No, I... I only acted like I didn’t know anything.”

Kaylie turned red and looked down.

“I don’t think Earl Clydereine would tear up the contract because of his daughter’s words... If something does happen, then I’ll be happy to help you. I’m the reason you’re in this situation in the first place.”

“No, hmm.... It’s not your fault.”

“Even if it isn’t, I can’t leave my friends alone if they’re in trouble.”

If the loan was an amount that could be provided by the Clydereine House, then it was possible for the Pameradia House to do the same. Her family assets weren’t something she could freely move, and there may be some conditions involved, but Elvis was likely to consider it if he knew that the citizens were troubled.

Kaylie laughed shyly at Cordelia’s words.

“Actually... It seems that the Hack House has also talked about helping with reconstruction.”

“Oh my, Clifton-sama did?”

“Yes... Hmm, actually... it’s embarrassing, but Clifton-sama... how do I say this... he’s waiting for my reply. The outer moat is perfect, hmm... he’s also thinking about helping with reconstruction, and his family knows about it...”

“What a schemer... is what I would like to say, but it’s his grievous mistake for making you misunderstand things.”

No, he tried his best, but his efforts were fruitless. Cordelia prayed that they would receive good fortune for the bad things they had experienced until now, and Kaylie started panicking.

“I-it’s not like that...! Hmm, my family said it was because I’m too dull...”

“Oh my, that’s a nice relationship.”

Cordelia thought that her prayer was unnecessary.

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After that, Cordelia sent Kaylie to where her mother was and then went home herself.

Cordelia thought alone while in the carriage.

What happened to Kaylie-sama is a good thing.

But I underestimated Shelley too much, she reflected.

(I have to be careful, but I thought it would be fine as long as I don’t engage her.)

Shelley believes in her dreams and thought she could use that to approach me. But if she’s using her position to take advantage of other people’s weaknesses, then I can’t just wait for time to pass.

“This means that I can’t just avoid her all the time.”

If I delay this problem any longer, then it may affect others.

“『Me in a red dress』, she said? If that’s the case, why don’t I wear it to play her game?”

Act 61: Noble Beliefs, Blooming with Resolution

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

When Cordelia got home, she immediately asked Emina to arrange for a tailor.

Emina was a little surprised that Cordelia wanted to have a red dress tailored as soon as possible.

“Ojou-sama, this is the first time that you’ve requested for a red dress, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“But I’m sure it’ll look nice on you.”

“Thanks.”

She couldn’t feel happy even though she was told it would look nice on her because of her complicated feelings.

Dark red gave off a strong and distinct impression, and it was also a suitable colour to wear for matches. And Emina was right, it was definitely a colour that suited Cordelia. After all, it was a colour that 『Cordelia』 knew suited her very well.

But she still wanted to avoid it because in a way it was her 『burial clothes』 .

(But if Shelley is convinced that I’m the 『Cordelia in the red dress』 , then I’ll take up the gauntlet. And I’m pretty sure I should put it on at least once as a way of bidding farewell to 『Cordelia』 .)

She decided that she would face this head on.

She couldn’t help but feel like she was losing the fight before it even started since she compromised.

“Would it take a bit of time if I commissioned for it now?”

“Normally, yes.”

“I see...”

“But as a matter of fact, Lindsey-sama, who has always been tailoring your dresses, has been making red dresses that fit you in her spare time, so I’m sure that she can have them ready after she’s made some adjustments and adds the finishing touches to them.”

“Huh? I don’t think I’ve ever paid for anything like that.”

She did remember Lindsey recommending her red dresses a number of times, but she had always chosen a different colour each time.

“Lindsey-sama likes to think of ideal dresses for people, so she makes them in hopes that the people, who she made them for, would wear them even if they don’t order them. I’m sure she would be delighted if you purchased it. ”

“I, I see...”

“It’s just that even if you’re satisfied with the dress, she might get new inspiration once you try it on and want to make small adjustments on the dress. But it’ll still be ready in time for the banquet.”

“That’s good. Thank you.”

Cordelia had no way of knowing what evening party Shelley would attend, but she did know of one evening party that Shelley would attend without having to inquire.

That was the 『Stargazing Banquet』 .

The Stargazing Banquet was hosted by the royal family; young men and women were invited to the banquet, and Cordelia also received an invitation to the banquet. Sylvester, who had just come of age, was this year’s host, and she had no reason to decline as long as she was in the royal capital and was depressed about this at first.

But there was no way she wouldn’t take advantage of this period if she was going to face Shelley face on.

(If she takes the initiative to misbehave in order to recreate her dreams even at a banquet hosted by the royal family, then she will finally be completely obsessed with her dreams. Kids who misbehave must be reasoned with.)

Actually, all Shelley was doing was throwing her temper mostly at Cordelia. There were other parts of her personality that were like the in-game 『Cordelia』 , but she hasn’t acted as radical as 『Cordelia』 yet.

(Even so, there might be a chance that she would go out of control and lose her life. The Clydereine House has as much magic power as I do.)

Cordelia had always felt that Shelley was troublesome and a bad omen.

But she has never wished that Shelley would lose her life.

Cordelia wasn’t good at dealing with Shelley and didn’t want to approach her, but Shelley had said that she wanted to be of use to her benefactor, Sylvester, unlike 『Cordelia』 , who wanted the position of Queen. It seemed like Shelley was running wild right now, but if she doesn’t use her power in the wrong way, then she might actually be of use to him.

(I guess no one by her side properly reasons with her because of her powers. But I also know very well that she isn’t someone who would listen either.)

Still, if Shelley had someone who had told her off then she probably wouldn’t have become like this. Cordelia felt that this was truly regrettable.

Cordelia walked down the corridor alone after she had left Emina and muttered to herself.

“I hope that I can bid farewell to 『Cordelia』 and Shelley’s dreams...”

When she got closer to her room, she decided to turn back and visit Ronnie. There was one thing she wanted to confirm before confronting Shelley.

Ronnie was relaxing before dinner in his room at the magician wing. He blinked when he saw Cordelia enter his room with a serious expression on her face.

“Ojou-sama, what’s wrong? You look very serious.”

“Say, Ronnie. I have a question for you... Of all the magic I can use, there’s nothing that can kill me if I use it too much, right?”

Cordelia still didn’t know what magic 『Cordelia』 had used to kill herself. Of course, she wasn’t going to cause an uproar, so she wouldn’t be using such magic, but she wanted to confirm this just in case.

“As far as I know, nothing you use can cause that. But you can faint if you overwork your magic. You couldn’t move in the woods before, right? But with that, you won’t die from the magic itself, because you won’t be able to move your body before you die.”

“I see. That’s good.”

“I don’t know what you’re thinking of doing, but you’re not trying to do something dangerous are you?”

“Of course not. I like peace too, so I don’t want to do anything dangerous.”

That was why she came here to confirm this, but Ronnie wasn’t convinced.

“I’m telling you this just in case, but if you find a curse or something, never try to break it yourself. If you do it on your own, then you’ll just be eaten by the curse.”

“As expected, I won’t often come across a situation where I need to undo a curse, right?”

He had probably given her that advice because of what had happened with Lara in the past, but Cordelia didn’t think it would be necessary this time.

Anyway, Cordelia couldn’t use magic that could kill her. It was reassuring to know this when she confronted Shelley.

(But, was Lara’s curse also from Dulaus?)

She was reminded of Ghost for a moment, but she sincerely hoped that nothing unnecessary would happen at the Stargazing Banquet.

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The day of the Stargazing Banquet.

Cordelia was a little perplexed when she saw her dressed up figure in the full-length mirror.

The in-game 『Cordelia』 had been stubborn, domineering and mean, but her appearance was gorgeous and lovely.

However, for some reason, Cordelia’s current appearance made her look strong.

“Won’t... people around me see me as domineering like this?”

The words spilled out of her mouth and her cheeks twitched.

(Red? Is it because of this red colour?)

Even though she had thought that, 『Cordelia’s』 dress had been the same shade of red, so she didn’t think that it was because of the colour. She thought she looked calmer than 『Cordelia』, but it was still a little shocking to see herself like this.

“Please relax a little more. Ojou-sama, you’re too nervous today.”

“Y-yes...”

Cordelia’s expression was so stiff that it made Emina smile wryly.

Cordelia smiled again and she felt like the intimidating aura that surrounded her earlier had faded a little.

Although her makeup was done modestly, she had on a bright red lipstick so that the dress wouldn’t overshadow her. She chose the rose that Gille had given her for her hair accessory, and it stood out even with her red dress.

Finally, she sprayed on some rose fragrance, and her preparations for battle were done.

“Well, shall we go now?”

Cordelia spoke to her reflection in the mirror.

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Cordelia had been to the castle many times now and was already used to it, but this was the first time she was heading to the Great Hall where the evening party was held.

While people who were attending the evening party were coming and going, Cordelia stopped once at the entrance of the venue.

“Isma-oniisama?”

“Ah, Cordelia?”

Isma was dressed in his knight uniform, and he probably was working and wasn’t here to attend the evening party.

“You’re dressed in a more spirited manner than usual today.”

“Do I give off the impression that I’m domineering, after all?”

“No, you don’t look like you’re domineering. But... every time I see you outside of home, I feel like you’ve grown up.”

Cordelia smiled wryly since Isma had celebrated her coming of age ceremony with her.

“Onii-sama. That’s something Otou-sama would say.”

“I’m worried since I have an adorable little sister.”

“Oh my, it’s an honour to hear you praise me.”

They laughed, then Isma spoke quietly.

“Lately, the relationship between father and Earl Clydereine has been dangerously bad. Father never cared even if the Earl had been openly hostile towards him, but nowadays, he clearly harbours ill-feeling towards the Earl.”

“That has... something to do with me, doesn’t it?”

“So, you know what is going on. If you need help, talk to Father. Of course, you can talk to me as well. However, I can’t stay near you much today since I have to work.”

“Thank you very much, Onii-sama. But don’t worry. I always talk to you two whenever I have a problem.”

“Really? Then, I feel at ease.”

Cordelia couldn’t tell from Isma’s expression whether he took it as a joke or seriously. Bowing at Isma’s back as he made his way towards his post, Cordelia slowly took a deep breath then stepped forward.

The warm glow from the chandeliers illuminated the marble floor in the spacious hall. Slow and quiet music was playing since the evening party hadn’t officially started yet. However, there were already a lot of men and women gathering around and talking. Perhaps because this party was for the younger generation, the women’s dresses were more brightly coloured than usual, and the venue looked gorgeous.

Cordelia briefly gazed around the hall, but there didn’t seem to be any sign of Shelley. As long as she was careful, then she wouldn’t be caught off guard.

The evening party was opened with a speech from a member of the royal family ——— that is, after Sylvester’s greetings, the orchestra will play music for dancing. After that, it was basically not too different from other evening parties, but there were scholars waiting to help the guests appreciate the night sky, and Cordelia heard that constellation boards will be loaned out. When Cordelia had first heard about this, she thought that it was an event that Gille would enjoy.

(I even thought that maybe Gille-sama would attend a night party without transformation magic cast on him... but I haven’t found anyone who looks like him yet.)

Considering that Gille-sama and Vernoux-sama get along really well, I thought that Gille-sama would be with Vernoux-sama in his original form too, but I haven’t seen a young man who looks like him yet.

He may not be here today either, but it'll be nice if I can talk to him about my travels the next time we meet. But, will that be possible? Unfortunately, I haven't even been able to thank him for the bracelet I'm wearing.

Cordelia proceeded to the wall while thinking. Along the way, she felt the women turn their gazes at her. They started chattering. She felt like she heard someone say they recognised her by her scent, and the women seemed restless, but they didn't speak to her straight away.

(Maybe because it's before the opening speech?)

Looking at her surroundings, she could also feel that they didn't want their conversation with her to be interrupted because of the opening speech.

It's kind of rare to be by myself, she thought as she looked slowly around the middle of the hall. She found someone amongst the crowd, who stood frozen, and tilted her head.

(Clive-sama?)

She didn't say this out loud and only moved her mouth. Clive also noticed her and walked towards her in rather large strides while blinking his eyes.

"... Cordelia-jou?"

"Eh? Yes, I'm Cordelia. It's been a while, Clive-sama."

Why did he say that in a questioning manner? She thought while curtsying.

She had seen Clive at Myles's evening party from a distance but couldn't talk to him because of Sylvester. But right now, he was acting cautious like he was greeting someone who he hadn't seen before.

"... What's wrong?"

It might have been her imagination, but she didn't know how to react.

Clive coughed once and spoke without any particular expression on his face.

"Excuse me. I have been entrusted with a message from His Highness. He would like to have a few words with you later."

"His Highness... wants to speak to me?"

"If he wanted to speak to someone else, then I wouldn't have had to inform you about this."

What Clive had said was correct, but Cordelia couldn't understand.

"I'm sure His Highness would be able to speak to me even if he didn't inform me beforehand... People probably wouldn't interrupt us."

I don't know why he wants to speak to me, but I also don't know how to refuse him either. I don't want to talk to him or get involved with him, but there isn't anyone here who he can't talk to since this evening party is hosted by the royal family.

However, Clive sighed at Cordelia's words.

“That’s why he’s telling you beforehand. He was worried that you might be offended if he interrupted your conversation with others.”

“I’m not that small-minded.”

“There’s no way His Highness would know that.”

Clive’s aura stated that he was only here to pass on the message and Cordelia widened her eyes.

“Cordelia-sama, what surprises you?”

“I wasn’t expecting to hear such words from you, Clive-sama. You’re aware I have as much room in my heart as everyone else.”

Clive frowned openly when he heard Cordelia’s words, but he didn’t deny it.

“I’d appreciate it if you stop speaking nonsense.”

“Oh my, it’s important.”

“Like always, unfortunately that part of you is exactly like Vernoux-sama.”

Clive expressed that his views didn’t match with Vernoux like always with those words.

“You get along well with Vernoux-sama, don’t you? Vernoux-sama mentioned that you hadn’t changed either, Clive-sama.”

“I don’t have time to listen to your nonsense either. Then, excuse me.”

“Oh my, I’m——”

Cordelia stopped apologising half-way through because she recognised Shelley's figure at the corner of her eye. Clive also glanced at where she was looking since she had stopped speaking unnaturally.

"... Earl Cyldereine's daughter? It would be best if you stayed away from her."

"Yes, I think so too. But... she's acting a bit strange, isn't she?"

Shelley and Cordelia's eyes met for a moment. Shelley threw a strong smile at Cordelia and said something to the waitress who was preparing the drinks. Cordelia didn't know what Shelley had said, but the waitress seemed troubled.

"Cordelia-sama, are you going over there?"

"Yes."

"It's not something you should poke your nose into. Moreover, it's her."

"But I've also prepared for complaints at the store, so I might be of help. Besides, it would be better to settle this before His Highness shows up, right?"

Clive sighed at Cordelia's query. It was fortunate for her since he didn't refute.

"Then, Clive-sama. I'll see you later."

Then, Cordelia turned her back to Clive.

(Shelley recognised me and is up to something. I don't want to tempt her, but she's troubling others. I just can't leave this alone.)

Considering the actions that Shelley has taken until now, her public attacks will be trivial. She will either get me involved while falling, say rude things to me, or deliberately step on my dress like she did last time... Those were the actions that immediately came to Cordelia's mind. She wasn't 『Cordelia』, and Shelley wasn't going crazy, so she should be able to handle it calmly.

When she got close enough to Shelley to be able to talk to her, her gaze clashed with Shelley's blue eyes. Seeing Shelley's provocative smile, Cordelia felt like Shelley was going to do something after all and put up her guard ———.

But who would have expected that multiple glasses would come flying towards her?

Cordelia realised that Shelley had done this when the cold liquid slid down her skin. Fortunately, the liquid was juice and not wine, but it had still gotten all over her face and dress. The glasses shattered when they hit the ground, and the sound unexpectedly echoed well around her.

(This is...! Normally anyone would be furious about this...!)

Cordelia wiped her face before she spoke, and the people around her looked at her quietly.

(I'm hogging all their attention.)

She could tell that everyone was looking at her while holding their breaths.

They may be able to understand the situation from the shattered glasses on the floor, the liquid on Cordelia's face and dress, and from seeing Shelley hold the tray, but they couldn't comprehend why

this situation had happened. Even Cordelia would have wondered what had happened if she saw this from an outsider's perspective.

Cordelia didn't miss the momentary look of accomplishment on Shelley's face, although Shelley seemed surprised.

(The Heroine didn't make this big of a blunder in the game.)

There was a scene in the game where the 『Heroine』 crashed into 『Cordelia』 and spilled her drink on her. But it hadn't been as brash as this. 『Cordelia』, who had only received a slight injury, flew into a rage and had made unreasonable demands to the 『Heroine』, so she might have been the person who had attracted everyone's attention instead.

I can't imagine why Shelley would do something like this, but I have no intention of following the scenario she wants.

(Let me declare that how the 『Cordelia』 she envisions would do.)

Cordelia was scared and nervous, but she decided to hide all that in her mind.

She had come here with the determination to confront Shelley. Even though she hadn't expected this to happen, she wasn't going to back down.

Cordelia made a blank face and opened her mouth with determination.

“『It's you again? Do you have any idea what you've done?』”

This was the first time that Cordelia had said the same words as the in-game 『Cordelia』 to Shelley.

The setting was different, but Cordelia decided that this line was accurate since Shelley wanted to expose the true nature of 『Cordelia』.

Shelley covered her mouth with both her hands.

“I, I wanted to help... I, I'm sorry, Cordelia-sama.”

Cordelia couldn't see Shelley's expression since she had her face down.

But it didn't seem like she was really apologising. She had done it intentionally from the start, and even though she seemed frightened, she had justified herself before apologising.

Cordelia sighed.

“『Look carefully at how foolish your actions were.』 You need to apologise sincerely and reflect on your actions, not try to justify yourself.”

“Cordelia-sama... Are you saying that words aren't enough? What would you like me to do to show my sincerity?”

What was the reason behind her trembling voice?

Shelley stiffened as Cordelia approached. Shelley might have expected a slap to come flying at her, but Cordelia wasn't 『Cordelia』. Even if she sometimes quoted 『Cordelia』, her thoughts were completely different from hers.

Cordelia walked straight past Shelley. When she took three steps forward and turned around, Shelley was still looking at her in surprise.

Cordelia turned her sharp gaze towards Shelley. *So, she really hasn't noticed after all.*

"The person you should be apologising to first is this person, is it not?"

"Excuse me?"

The person who was trembling the most at those words was the waitress who had turned pale.

Shelley didn't understand the meaning behind Cordelia's words even when she saw the trembling waitress who was speechless.

The waitress quickly lowered her head in a panic.

"I, I'm sorry...! Are you...!?"

"Please don't worry about it. I'm alright."

"But, th-the glass... your dress too...!"

The waitress was extremely confused since the drinks she had prepared were snatched by a young lady, and then used to harm another young lady. Then, her eyes widened even more when she saw the glass shards scattered on the floor. Cordelia stopped the waitress with one hand when she was about to run up to the shards.

"Please calm down. You're going to hurt your hands. It seems like other people have gone to get cleaning tools, so please wait."

"B-but..."

"It's alright, this will all be over by the time His Highness arrives."

Still, the waitress's colour didn't return to her face as she was wondering how this had happened.

"Shelley-sama, are you not going to apologise?"

"I don't understand what you're saying! It's obvious that that person has done nothing wrong! What does she need to be afraid of?!"

Shelley's face was filled with frustration.

Cordelia had spoken words that 『Cordelia』 would say, and yet the result was different from what Shelley had imagined.

Shelley was supposed to expose the ugly truth about 『Cordelia』, but she understood that it had not gone as she had expected from how people around her were acting.

Cordelia slowly stood up.

"It is responsibility for the job that you've been entrusted with. The host will probably ask who is responsible for this."

"Are you trying to blame her? The glass isn't yours, so don't talk like you're all that!"

“I’m saying that that is a possible scenario. This situation could be perceived as such, she let a guest help her with her job, and thus caused harm to someone the royal family had invited. Even if I didn’t care, I wouldn’t be surprised if she were to be held accountable in some way.”

Shelley probably didn’t understand the value of the glasses here. Cordelia’s dress might stain as well. Shelley probably didn’t even imagine what would happen if the bill for these things were directed at the waitress.

When Shelley glared at her while trying to find the words to refute, Cordelia pressed her for answers.

“What the hell do you want to do by causing trouble for others? If you’re going to continue to do these things, then I’ll be prepared to make an enemy out of Cordelia Enna Pameradia. I won’t show you any mercy.”



With that declaration of war, Cordelia felt as if a weight had been lifted off her shoulders.

Although her conflict with Shelley wasn't completely over, she was able to tell Shelley this firmly in the dress that 『Cordelia』 preferred to wear, using the same lines as 『Cordelia』 but yet, with a different opinion than 『Cordelia』. With that, Cordelia felt like she could bid farewell to 『Cordelia』.

However, Shelley's voice shook.

“Why... do you speak as if you're on the side of justice...!?”

Her voice was honestly really quiet. She had asked a question, but she wasn't asking Cordelia this. But no matter what Shelley thought, there was no one here who would take her side.

Then, Shelley suddenly stepped forward and grabbed Cordelia's arm.

“Wah?!”

“If only... if only you had acted like you did in my dreams!”

Cordelia widened her eyes at the magic that flowed into her arm.

Suddenly, an unpleasant feeling coiled around her body and her heart jumped loudly. The feeling was extremely close to the sensation she had felt when she had dispelled Lara's curse.

(This is a curse...?! Why does Shelley...?!)

I can guess that Shelley had strong magic powers since she was born to the Clydereine House, but I didn't think she could use this kind of magic in two years. Besides, would Earl Clydereine even teach her this kind of spell?

She tried to shake Shelley's arm off, but the chill made it hard to move. Besides, the power that Shelley had used to grasp her arm was so strong that it was hard to believe it came from a lady.

(Is her magic going out of control too?!)

Cordelia understood that Shelley didn't care if she had killed herself in this process and desperately tried to resist.

However, her momentary lapse in judgement had been grave.

(This is bad...!)

The graveness of the situation must have been immediately conveyed to everyone else around Cordelia and Shelley as well, because she thought she heard the voice of a knight on duty.

(But she won't make it...!)

I have to get away at all costs — — — With that thought, Cordelia concentrated all her nerves and resisted with her magic.

(There's no way I'm giving up...!)

She persuaded herself, and her arm suddenly became hot.

(This is the bracelet Gille-sama gave me...?)

The heat ran through her body as if counteracting all the chills she was experiencing, and the unpleasant feeling that was consuming her, disappeared.

The bracelet shattered at the same time.

Cordelia looked at the bracelet that had fallen onto the floor while trying to calm her rugged breaths.

(I was protected by this bracelet...?)

Shelley was seized by the knight while Cordelia breathed a sigh of relief. However, Shelley had already fainted and didn't show any resistance.

"Are you hurt?"

The knight who had spoken to her was Clarice, someone whom she already knew. Cordelia shook her head a little.

"No, I'm fine. More importantly, she might have some kind of curse cast on her."

"A curse...?"

"I don't know. But she had magic flowing through her that I don't believe is hers."

Cordelia informed Clarice quietly and Clarice nodded.

Shelley had invoked magic to harm Cordelia, and in the castle at that. This needed to be investigated even if it was determined that the magic wouldn't kill Cordelia. Cordelia didn't know what punishment Shelley would receive because of that, but that wasn't something she could control.

"I'm going to leave for now. I'm not dressed appropriately to be in public at the moment."

"Then, I'll call Isma-sama."

"Thank you for your concern, but it's alright. I can't interrupt Onii-sama's work."

Isma may have already heard about this commotion, but Cordelia didn't want any plans to be changed since this was an event sponsored by the royal family.

Cordelia picked up the shattered bracelet.

"May I ask you to arrange a carriage for me? I look like this, so I'll wait for them in the less crowded courtyard."

"Understood. Then, I'll have someone go with you."

"No, that's fine too. I at least know where we are, I need to calm down a bit."

When Cordelia said that, Clarice didn't say anything else either.

But Cordelia remembered that she had something to say before she left, so she bent down in front of the waitress and spoke.

"If you're worried about the glasses, then I'll explain this at a later date. It's clear that you hadn't intended for this to happen."

“No, that’s... I, I...”

“I don’t mind. But if you’re that concerned about today’s events and don’t want to work here anymore, then I would like to invite you to the Pameradia House. We welcome responsible people.”

Then, Cordelia left the hall. As she passed Clive, she was able to tell him, “Please allow me to have that talk with His Highness at a later date.”



After reaching the courtyard, Cordelia made sure that no one was around and slowly stretched.

“I’m so tired...!”

Although she knew this was an unfit act for a young lady, she couldn’t help but do so. The remaining burdens on her shoulders were all lifted, and her mind was really clear.

It’s over, it’s over, it’s over.

That thought spread down to her fingertips. The phantom of 『Cordelia』 was covered in a haze, and she no longer cared about wearing red dresses.

She didn’t have to think about the fear which was caused by the relationship between the 『Heroine』 and 『Cordelia』 that had been nested in her heart for a long time. She may encounter trouble in the future, but that wouldn’t be determined by the fate of the in-game 『Cordelia』.

Shadows of 『Cordelia』 shouldn’t cross through her mind anymore.

“I don’t know what kind of punishment will be given to Shelley, but hopefully this will give her a chance to face reality...”

Cordelia wasn’t going to get involved with Shelley anymore, but she wasn’t going to blame her either. She did feel something towards the curse, but she felt that she could have become 『Cordelia』 if she didn’t have memories of her previous life.

Besides, there was something that worried her more than Shelley’s future.

That is the magic that Shelley had used. Since she had felt something similar to Lara’s curse, it was highly possible that this magic came from Dulaus Kingdom.

(I don’t think... Shelley was forced to obey the curse like Lara was. If anything, it’s possible that she accepted the curse because she was tempted to.)

Given Shelley’s personality, she would gladly accept the curse if she was told that it could expose my true nature.

It was easy for Cordelia to guess who would say such a thing.

In the game, there was a red-eyed man who had instigated 『Cordelia』. It wouldn’t be strange for that man to be interested in Shelley since her personality was similar to that of 『Cordelia’s』. *Someone who knows a lot of Dulaus magic and takes pleasure in tricking people* —— she thought and only one person came to mind.

(What the hell did Ghost do this for...?)

Her sense of liberation turned into tension again.

Ghost had said that he didn't want to go near the castle because he didn't like how guarded it was, but if he had instigated Shelley, then he wouldn't miss this. A large part of his reasoning for doing things is because he wants to see it happen.

Cordelia squinted her eyes and looked around.

If Ghost is around, then he would be in a place that doesn't have a lot of guards. And if he wanted to see that hall, then he would need to be in a high place, —— Cordelia thought and looked up at the castle walls, then she saw a shadow move slightly.

She couldn't see who it was clearly, but her instincts told her that was Ghost.

And she felt a disgusting smile was directed at her from the direction of the shadow.

“...”

She thought that all her problems involving 『Cordelia』 had been taken care of, but there were still some left.

If I don't settle things with Ghost, then I can't really bid farewell to 『Cordelia』.

(If Ghost had really instigated this, then he would approach me again.)

When she thought that, she heard hastened footsteps and put her guard up.

(Who is it...?)

I'm sure they will call me when the carriage is ready, but those rough footsteps don't seem to be from someone who's coming to call me.

What on earth is going on? Cordelia turned around and saw an unexpected person.

“Your Highness...?”

Cordelia was speechless at the appearance of the —— breathless, black-haired, and golden-eyed young man, Sylvester.

There was no way the host, Sylvester, would be dawdling at a place like this. She couldn't see any attendants nearby. *Why the hell did he come to a place like this by himself?* Cordelia was so surprised that she even forgot to curtsy.

Sylvester didn't even try to catch his breath as he approached Cordelia. Watching him, Cordelia finally realised that she had to greet him and quickly curtsied before opening her mouth to do so.

But before she could, shock ran through her body. It wasn't until she heard his voice by her ear that she had realised that it was because Sylvester was hugging her.

“Thank god.”

No, there's nothing good about this situation.

Cordelia couldn't comprehend his actions and could only blink. Her body had stiffened from her confusion and she even felt as if she had become a tree.

However, the hug didn't last for long, and Sylvester let go off her as if he had been repelled and stepped back.

"I'm sorry for my sudden action."

"I-it's alright..."

She was certainly surprised, but she was hesitant to tell him that, so she slurred her words. Sylvester had apologised but he looked more relieved than sorry.

"Umm... did you hear about the commotion?"

Cordelia asked timidly while feeling something that was difficult to explain.

Of course, she understood what she had said, but there was nothing else to talk about. It was natural for the host to worry if their guests are harmed. But as far as she was concerned, she was safe, and she wanted to tell Sylvester that he should return soon since he had to give his greetings. But it was also uncomfortable to say this to someone who had come all the way here because they were concerned about her.

However, it was very strange for someone, who she had been avoiding, to be this worried about her.

Sylvester looked gently at Cordelia, who was experiencing mixed feelings, and nodded.

"The knight did report to me, but I felt a strange magical reaction. I'm sorry. I apologise from the bottom of my heart for putting you in danger."

"No, you don't need to apologise for that."

He had people in the room who were ready to react to anything that could happen. Cordelia felt that the knight wouldn't make it in time, but she might have been able to. Cordelia also thought that the guards prepared today was appropriate since it was hard to imagine that a normal guest, or even a royal or important person would be harmed directly.

Sylvester laughed in a troubled manner at Cordelia's reply. From his expression, Cordelia could tell that Sylvester felt responsible as the host, and he might have come here because the victim was someone he knew.

However, she thought it was a bit too much for him to hug her all of a sudden——.

(Huh?)

Even now, she didn't have any particularly good feelings towards Sylvester.

Although she didn't have any good feelings towards him, she suddenly realised that there was no reason for her to avoid him anymore since she had bid farewell to 『Cordelia』 and 『Shelley』 had become a nobody to him.

(Well, it's not like it matters... Yeah, that's right. There's nothing wrong with keeping things the way they are.)

There may not be a reason to avoid him, but I don't need to get particularly close to him either.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. More importantly, don’t you have to give your greetings soon, Your Highness...?”

“I still have time. But you’ll get angry if I stay here and don’t give my speech.”

Then Sylvester removed his cloak and wrapped it around Cordelia.

“The wind is getting a little chilly. Please be careful on your way home.”

“Yo-your Highness! It’ll get dirty!”

Even Cordelia knew that her dress wasn’t dry yet. The cloak might have already gotten wet, but she still tried to quickly remove it, however a hand forcefully held it in place.

“It’s alright. It’ll be more troublesome if you were to catch a cold.”

“But you dressed up for this event... Especially since you’ll be giving your greetings soon.”

“... Am I bothering you?”

“N-no...”

“Then, don’t worry about it.”

I can’t do that, but I don’t think he will back down at this rate.

“If you’re worried about it, then please bring sweets with you when you return the cloak to me.”

“Excuse me?”

“Vernoux always brags about them, you see. He says the sweets at your house are top-notch.”

“... Okay.”

If that was his biggest compromise, then Cordelia had no choice but to follow it. Rather, she was worried whether it was alright to give him sweets in exchange for dirtying his cloak, but if she questioned him further, then he would be late for his speech.

“You don’t have to return it quickly. You can take your time and return it when you’ve calmed down.”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

“—— But, I’m really glad that the bracelet protected you.”

Cordelia widened her eyes in surprise at those words, but Sylvester had already turned his back towards her.

Then, without pause, she heard the sound of Vernoux’s familiar voice, “Your Highness!”

“Clive is searching for you with a red face.”

“I told him I would be right back.”

“You know that he’s a worrier. Please return.”

Cordelia looked down at the shattered bracelet in her left hand while listening to their conversation.

*Would someone tell him that my bracelet had shattered even if they told him about Shelley's outburst?
Is that kind of detailed description reported in the first place?*

(No, he might have heard about it...)

But it's bothering me.

Even Cordelia didn't know that the bracelet contained some kind of defensive magic.

The person who would have known this was ———.

(... No way, right?)

Cordelia felt her cheeks twitch, but she decided that it was her imagination.

Even though she thought so, she couldn't help but be bothered by the fact that the name 『Gille』 was close to 『Sylvester』 [1].

(But Vernoux-sama acts differently towards Gille-sama and Sylvester-sama...)

But, if Gille-sama is really Sylvester-sama, then I understand why Vernoux-sama didn't reveal this straight away. He couldn't just mention that His Highness was sneaking out to go incognito.

(Am I thinking too much? But...)

While Cordelia was puzzled, Vernoux had finished speaking to Sylvester, and had approached her.

“Dilly, I heard that your carriage is ready.”

“Oh, okay.”

“That was quite showy.”

As he said this, Cordelia took the handkerchief that was handed to her and wiped her hair. The liquid had stopped dripping, but her hair was stained. At this rate, the cloak would be stained as well.

“It wasn't my fault.”

“I've heard all about it. I'm glad you're not hurt, but what are you going to do about that?”

That would be referring to the cloak that Sylvester had lent her.

“I'll return it once I've had it cleaned.”

“No, that's not what I'm asking. When are you going to come to give it back?”

“When I find a suitable time. I don't want to think about anything else today.”

When she said that and showed him she was tired, Vernoux just said, “I see,” and didn't pursue the matter any further.

(He might be able to clarify this if I ask him. But, since he's helping His Highness go incognito, he can't possibly tell the truth, and if I'm wrong... he'll definitely make fun of me.)

It's definitely bad to ask him carelessly.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“I feel like you’re in a bad mood... Well, would it be strange if you were in a good mood after what happened today?”

He had jumped to the wrong conclusion, but Cordelia didn’t correct him. It was obvious that it would be complicated to explain what she was thinking.

“I’m going to go home and relax for today. I have a lot of things to do tomorrow.”

The matters that have been settled and new questions.

She thought about many things, but first, she had to clean the cloak and give it back. But she decided that she would think about that tomorrow.

(If Gille-sama is His Highness, then I don’t know what kind of expression to make when I talk to him.)

I didn’t say or do anything rude to him, right? She thought back, but her head hurt when she thought that she had lectured the next King on their first meeting.

Hopefully, I’m just thinking too much. ——— But if I am, then who is Gille-sama?

(Let’s go home and sleep. I should sleep and clear my head.)

However, when she returned home, Elvis was outraged by her stained dress and the fact that the cloak she was wearing belonged to Sylvester. He asked her furiously what had happened, and she had spent the entire night trying to calm him down, thus it was only when the sky began to brighten that she was finally able to sleep.

Act 62: Your Name Is...

Translator: Blushy

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The day after the Stargazing Banquet.

Cordelia had planned on living her life as it was before the banquet, but because she was attacked by magic, she had to undergo various examinations the next day, and even all her plans had been changed.

Fortunately, it was determined that she hadn't suffered any adverse effects, and she was finally able to return to her daily routine from noon.

Three days after the examinations.

Cordelia was in the laboratory with Ronnie, but she wasn't able to concentrate on writing.

"Ojou-sama, what are you planning on doing to that?"

"What?"

"I don't think you can use that paper anymore."

Cordelia quickly looked at her hand when she heard what Ronnie had said. She had unconsciously stopped moving her hand while writing, and the paper was filled with ink.

"... I'll rewrite it."

"That's what I thought. Well, a lot of things happened, so isn't it fine if you take things slowly? Ah, the cloak has been washed. The dress and the ornament seem like they'll stain a little though."

"Thanks."

While thanking Ronnie for being a skilful magician, Cordelia felt like sighing since she had to confront the problem that she wanted to put off.

(I have to meet His Highness...)

She thought and felt down.

Even if the sinister cause was gone, avoiding the Prince was already a conditioned reflex for her. Furthermore, she didn't know how to talk to him when she thought that he might be Gille.

(If His Highness is Gille-sama, then he's been hiding his identity for eight years already, right? Am I that untrustworthy...? No, if I were told that Gille-sama is His Highness, then we wouldn't have gotten along in the first place, and this hasn't been confirmed yet...!)

Cordelia never imagined that she would be worried by this. It would have been obvious had he only changed his hair colour like Vernoux did, but he changed his hairdo, his hair colour, his eye colour and his magic presence.

But while she was worrying about this, Cordelia felt Ronnie stare at her.

“What’s wrong?”

“Ojou-sama, I just thought once again that you never betray my expectations for the better or worse. I know that you were the victim this time, but I was surprised that this happened as a result of you approaching Clydereine-jou. I always tell you not to do anything dangerous.”

Cordelia softened her expression at Ronnie’s complaint.

“Ojou-sama, it’s not funny.”

“I’m not laughing. I’m just grateful that you said that.”

“Well, your opponent was just a mere lady, so one wouldn’t normally think that she would suddenly cast a curse like that, so I guess it can’t be helped...”

Still, Ronnie groaned as if he wasn’t quite convinced. He must have been really worried about her.

As for Shelley, it seemed that she really did try to cast a curse.

However, her curse didn’t force the person to act against their will like Lara’s curse had been. Her curse intensified people’s hatred for the target and increased the possibility of the target getting wounded or killed.

Shelley stated in her investigation with the knights that 『there was someone who cast a charm on me so that I can use magic better』, but since the magic technique originated from Dulaus, Earl Clydereine’s family was also being investigated.

Elvis routinely asked Earl Clydereine about Shelley’s behaviour towards Cordelia, but Earl Clydereine kept insisting that Cordelia was at fault as well. However, in this case, Earl Clydereine couldn’t make any excuses for his daughter’s behaviour, and his dejected appearance was appalling. Cordelia being harmed wasn’t a big deal for Earl Clydereine, but he was probably shocked that his daughter’s actions had destroyed the plans he had.

The magic from Dulaus Kingdom was a delicate topic, so the matter of Shelley casting the curse, and the investigation into Earl Clydereine was not made public. However, the fact that Shelley had caused a ruckus could not be erased, so it was made public that she had fallen mentally ill and was ordered to recuperate. In fact, her magic had been sealed so that she can’t cast the curse ever again. Earl Clydereine pleaded for this decision to be reconsidered since he might lose the 『Dreamer Power』, but his pleas went unheard.

“The chefs have been working hard to make the sweets for when you return the cloak, so there’s nothing to worry about there. They said that they could have it ready for you today or tomorrow.”

“I see.”

“The servants have been talking about this a lot. They’ve been saying things like His Highness and Ojou-sama might start a romance. Well, from my point of view, it wouldn’t be that surprising if that were to happen.”

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, the servants are being secretive about this so that Master won’t hear about it, so you don’t have to worry about this.”

No, that’s not what I asked.

Ronnie had never seen Cordelia with Sylvester. A knock sounded at the door just as she was about to ask a question.

Cordelia gave permission to the person at the door, and Emina led Vernoux into the laboratory. Vernoux raised his hand lightly. Like always, he had probably followed after Emina as she was going to inform Cordelia that he had visited.

“Hey Dilly. Are you planning on going to the Big Bookcase?”

“You’re asking a very specific question.”

“I thought you would be troubled about how to contact him. I’m glad there doesn’t seem to be any adverse effects on your body.”

“Thank you.”

Ronnie left the laboratory when Vernoux entered.

“Would you like some tea and snacks?”

“No, I just stopped by since I’m on my way to the castle. Give the sweets to His Highness.”

“Give it to him, you say...? What a way to put it.”

However, it was true that she couldn’t put it off any further. Besides, she could maintain calm much better with Vernoux around rather than go alone in confusion.

“Would you give me some time? At least, let me change my dress.”

“Then, I think I’ll have some sweets in the meantime.”

“So, you’re going to eat some after all.”

“Well, yeah. Oh, you don’t have to doll up and make yourself look good, so just be quick. It’s not good for you to tire yourself out either.”

Cordelia smiled wryly at Vernoux’s statement. *Did he say that out of concern since I had magic cast on me, or was he just rushing me?*

Either way, Cordelia finished getting ready by the time Vernoux got sick of eating sweets and headed to the castle with him.

◆◆◆◆◆

When they arrived at the castle, Cordelia didn’t hesitate to follow Vernoux’s lead to the room that she had visited a few years back.

There, Cordelia took a deep breath. She knew that Sylvester was in this room, but she hadn't thought of what to say to him other than thanking him. *Should I just thank him and confirm the rest after I've collected my thoughts?* Cordelia thought while Vernoux told the guards that they were entering the room.

Then, Cordelia followed after Vernoux and entered the room.

"Welcome. Ah... I'm pleased that you have come."

Vernoux hadn't told Sylvester that he would be bringing Cordelia with him. Sylvester looked a little surprised to see Cordelia. Cordelia glanced at Vernoux, but he didn't seem particularly bothered by this.

"Your Highness, I've brought her for you. I'll leave the rest to you."

"Huh, Vernoux-sama?"

"I have to work. You can go back by yourself, right?"

Cordelia felt like he was trying to induce her rather than provoke her, but Vernoux turned around and left without listening to her answer.

"Vernoux said something unreasonable again. I'm sorry."

"I-it's alright... I'm sorry for suddenly intruding on you."

"Don't worry about it. Are you feeling alright now?"

"Yes. Hmm... Thank you for lending me this. And, I've brought you some sweets."

Sylvester got up from his chair when he saw the cloak and sweets in Cordelia's hand, then he slowly approached Cordelia and took the items off her hand. Cordelia remembered what had happened the other day and wanted to take a step back, but she stopped herself from doing so. She couldn't leave until she returned his cloak, and he wasn't someone who she could act rudely towards.

"I've certainly received the items."

"It's clean as far as I can see..."

"It's alright. Even if there are stains, it would be on the inside, so no one will care."

Sylvester said then laughed.

"Oh yes. If you don't mind, would you like to join me for a short break?"

"Excuse me?"

"The greenhouse. I couldn't show you it last time."

Cordelia nodded, unsure about what expression she should make. However, she was careful not to twitch her face.

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The greenhouse was designed by Elvis, so the exterior was similar to the one at the Pameradia House. However, it was larger than the one in the Pameradia House, as expected of the royal family.

But Cordelia wasn't calm enough to worry about such things. Sylvester hadn't said anything while they were walking here, so Cordelia followed him in silence, but it wasn't like the aura was heavy.

It just felt awkward.

"Come in."

The inside of the greenhouse was filled with colourful flowers.

Unlike the Pameradia House's greenhouse where most of the plants were grown for their practical uses, the flowers in this greenhouse were mostly for viewing and were gorgeous. There were many flowers from the southern region, and it was especially colourful near the entrance.

"Oh my."

Cordelia quickly suppressed her voice that had unexpectedly spilled out with her hands, but the flowers were so beautiful that she couldn't remove her eyes from them.

"The back is used for improvement research, but please look around here first."

"Yes."

When she walked past the flowers, she found many medicinal herbs, which were similar to those at the Pameradia House's greenhouse, planted in the spaces. And there were small red fruits in the high seed-plot where Sylvester had stopped.

"Are those... strawberries?"

"Yes. It's a variety that can be grown outside of winter, and it's really sour. It tastes very refreshing and delicious."

Sylvester plucked two strawberries as he said this. Then, he put one in his mouth to taste it, and offered the other one to Cordelia.

"I always take my breaks like this. You can have one too, if you'd like ———, oh, I better wash this."

Sylvester had eaten the strawberry as it was, and it was hanging from the plant, so it didn't touch the soil. Before Cordelia could tell him not to worry about it, Sylvester had summoned some water in the air and washed the fruit, then he vanished the water.

"Thank you very much."

As expected of the royal family, they're very good at casting magic.

(But it's kind of a waste of his magical talents...)

Cordelia took the strawberry and removed the stems before putting it in her mouth. Then, a nice level of sourness spread through her mouth. Cordelia preferred sour strawberries over overly sweet ones.

“Delicious.”

“That’s good.”

Cordelia had forgotten to use honorifics since the words had just spilled out of her mouth, but Sylvester smiled happily when he heard her words. His expression on his face was unfamiliar to her, but it also looked familiar.

Cordelia stared at his expression and put a smile on her face even though she was nervous.

Maybe I’m just thinking too much.

However, now is my chance to utter the words I can’t say in public.

Cordelia decided to take her chance while feeling her heart thump loudly in her chest.

“Thank you very much, Gille-sama.”

“You’re welcome.”

It might have been a reflexive response. Nevertheless, Cordelia felt her heart hammer in her chest as she smiled.

“——— Huh?”

After a moment of silence, Cordelia had no idea what that brief word, that Sylvester had said, meant. *The outcome of me taking this chance should be revealed with his next words* ——— or so she thought, but the next thing that reached her ears was not Sylvester’s reply, but the sound of footsteps in the distance.

“Excuse me, Your Highness!”

The guard shouted from a place a little further away, then he trotted up to them when Sylvester turned towards him.

The guard seemed a little surprised to see Cordelia here, so Cordelia stepped back. She couldn’t interrupt them if the guard had come here to deliver a message.

“What? That’s supposed to be tomorrow ———”

“Yes. But…”

“… Right. I can’t keep them waiting even if they’re early.”

Cordelia understood that Sylvester had an appointment from their conversation.

If so, then she figured that she should leave, but the timing was bad. If she were to leave without her answers, then she didn’t know when she could ask him about it next, no, she didn’t even know if she could find the right timing to ask about this again.

(Umm, it might not be something that I have to find out right now…)

In any case, there was nothing she could do now. Even Sylvester, who had an apologetic look on his face, seemed as if he was urging her to go home.

It was time for Cordelia to excuse herself from the castle.

“Oh dear, are you troubled by my early arrival?”

There stood a young woman, who spoke in an older dialect, with almond red eyes and white hair.

Act 63: The Northern Princess

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Act 63: The Northern Princess

“Rufina-dono, you’re here early.”

Sylvester sent the guard away as he said that to the woman who had just appeared. This person was Sylvester’s guest.

The woman named Rufina, who looked a little older than Cordelia and Sylvester, smiled provocatively.

“I’m sorry for interrupting your date. Even though you have someone like me...”

Cordelia couldn’t help but widen her eyes at those words.

『Even though you have someone like me』.

What does that mean? ——— Before she could ask that question, Sylvester answered Rufina in a strong tone.

“Please stop joking.”

“You don’t have any humour.”

“There’s nothing humorous about a joke that doesn’t make you laugh.”

“Really? By the way, is that red-eyed girl one of my brethren? Girl, I’ll allow you to tell me your name.”

“I am Earl Pameradia’s daughter. My name is Cordelia Enna Pameradia.”

Cordelia reflexively curtsied when prompted, but the word ‘brethren’ bothered her a lot. She could guess that Rufina was from another kingdom from her accent, so she might have used the wrong word.

(But her status seems high.)

Judging from Sylvester-sama’s response, she must be royalty from another kingdom. Rufina turned to Cordelia and nodded in satisfaction.

“Cordelia, was it? I am a messenger from Dulaus, Rufina Dulaus. I am the next King of the kingdom you call 『Northern Kingdom』. I have a slight accent, but I can speak your language, so you don’t have to be polite.”

Cordelia widened her eyes at those words. She thought that Rufina was some kingdom’s royal member, but she didn’t expect it to be Dulaus.

(But why did she reveal her identity to me...?)

Crista Kingdom and Dulaus Kingdom weren’t on very good terms, but she didn’t feel any tension when Sylvester and Rufina had interacted earlier. However, even if that were the case, Cordelia thought it was careless of Rufina to reveal her identity to someone who didn’t know who she was.

Sylvester seemed a little surprised by Rufina's words, but Rufina didn't care and said something Cordelia hadn't expected.

"Cordelia, will you help me get rid of Ghost?"

If the Ghost she was referring to was the red-eyed young man who Cordelia knew, then she couldn't ask for better. However, it was hard for her to believe that someone associated with the royal family in Dulaus, the supposed home of Ghost, would say this to someone on the first meeting.

"That's an erratic question."

Cordelia replied harmlessly. However, Rufina's lips turned upwards, and she looked at Sylvester.

"Sylvester-dono, I would like this girl to attend the tea party."

"But, Rufina-dono..."

"What? I just want to talk with her a little. I'll give up if you refuse. But if I can't talk to her, then I'll go to this girl's house?"

Sylvester let out a small sigh when he heard this and turned to Cordelia. His expression showed that he was unwilling to let her attend the tea party, and it also told Cordelia that it wasn't just an invitation to tea.

"Sorry, Cordelia-san. Can you accompany us for a bit?"

"Yes."

"Then, let's move."

At that point, Sylvester whispered into Cordelia's ears, "You don't have to push yourself." From those words, Cordelia concluded that Rufina wasn't talking about spirits when she had said Ghost, but the person.

(But, why did Rufina-sama ask me that?)

Cordelia wondered, but for now, she followed Sylvester and Rufina out of the greenhouse.

A tea set was immediately brought out to the room where the three of them went, and warm tea was brewed. The servants left on Sylvester's signal.

"You don't have to put your guard up that much, Fragrant Girl. But, Sylvester-dono... Your Kingdom has the dreamer girl and the girl who can manipulate invisible scents. There really is no end to talent in this Kingdom."

This meant that the rumours of this Kingdom also reached the Dulaus royal family to some extent. However, Rufina's statement didn't make Cordelia feel closer to the royal member of another Kingdom, nor did it make her confusion disappear.

Rufina laughed when she looked at how Cordelia was acting.

“Well, of course you would be confused. A royal from another Kingdom, and Dulaus at that, has asked for your help. If I were in your shoes, I would think I’d gone crazy.”

“No, it’s not like that...”

“Rufina-dono.”

“It’s not like I’m bullying her. Don’t glare at me.”

Rufina pouted at the sound of Sylvester’s voice, but she immediately relaxed.

“Well then, I’ll tell you a little about myself before we get to the main topic. I am the second child of King Dulaus, and I am currently fighting with my brother for the throne. I need achievements to ascend the throne. Among other things, I have been trying to arrange a treaty with Sylvester-dono to improve the food situation in our Kingdom.”

“A treaty...?”

“I can’t wilfully talk about the details. In the past, our Kingdom had only invaded Crista because we lack food due to poor lands and snow damage. So, the quickest way to improve this is by getting the people and the nobles on my side.”

Even though Rufina had said that she couldn’t talk about the situation, she seemed to have announced the true state of affairs in her Kingdom.

It was unclear to Cordelia whether improving the food situation meant that Dulaus would be importing food or if they would be receiving technical support.

“Well, it’s easier said than done, and Sylvester-dono’s terms are quite harsh. I thought he was a demon.”

“We’ve also had a lot of trouble adjusting too. Please don’t say such disreputable things.”

“But do you have any idea how hard it is to change things like military preparations along the border? As a result, I was almost killed by the conservatives’ rebellion. Fortunately, I was able to get a silver mine from the nobles who wanted to kill me, so I got funds for the army.”

“Killed...?!”

“It’s something that happens to the royal family in my Kingdom. There are nobles who are afraid that we will be invaded by foreign kingdoms because our military is weakening, but more than that there are those who would gobble up all the profits gained from selling weapons to the kingdom, and people who profit off bribes under the pretence of purchasing weapons. In general, even though Dulaus produces some silver and gold, they don’t want Crista enough to bite off more than they can chew, so there’s no need to worry about being invaded.”

However, some of them might have been hit hard by the military change. Two years ago, Ghost had said that there were northern nobles who wanted the 『Dreamer Girl』, so that might have had something to do with this. Cordelia didn’t know what to ask Rufina since she had said that she had almost been killed but acted as if nothing had happened.

“But, besides that, it’s a good thing that we ended up destroying the Dark Guild. Unfortunately, we let the red-eyed man get away.”

“Is that person 『Ghost』?”

“Yeah. He’s done some bad things in the kingdom in the past, but it’s gotten worse lately. If this continues to escalate, then the people of Crista will hate Dulaus even more, and we might have to start this plan all over again. Ghost hasn’t received any instructions from the northern royalty, and the best way to prove this is by capturing him. Which is why I want to capture him and claim that he has nothing to do with the northern royal family. Even within Dulaus, people have made a lot of accusations towards me because I failed to capture him, and above all, he has caused harm to people in both kingdoms.”

Rufina looked sour as if she had eaten a bitter bug.

“That’s all I have to say. Do you have anything to ask me?”

“Why did you invite me to join you in getting rid of Ghost?”

“In Dulaus we use anything we can. I invited you because it seems like you would be useful. I’m looking for help from various people, but I still haven’t got any noble ladies from this kingdom. Someone who Sylvester-dono trusts, would not trouble him... nor would they tell anyone about this discussion. If you were someone like that, then Sylvester-dono would have tried harder to stop me.”

Cordelia certainly didn’t plan on telling anyone about this. Easing tensions with the north should also help reduce this kingdom’s military burden. She didn’t know how much of an outcome this would have, but she knew that cooperating and compromising with Rufina, who had just barely found their common ground, would be extraordinary. She couldn’t be irresponsible and interfere with that.

“Then, I’ll just ask one thing. What do you think about this Prince Sylvester?”

“Me?”

Sylvester’s expression was hard to describe, but he also looked as if he didn’t want her to get involved. However, Rufina interrupted him before he could speak.

“Don’t disagree, Sylvester-dono.”

“But she’s not a trained soldier. There’s no need to get her involved in this, is there?”

“The same goes for the merchants, right? If I’m not mistaken, since she’s the daughter of Earl Pameradia, her sister-in-law and her family were involved in the silk incident? It’s possible that Ghost might try to contact her again, and it wouldn’t be bad for her to have me and you help her when it happens.”

The flora silk incident wasn’t big enough for the royal family of another kingdom to know. On top of that, Cordelia surmised that she had investigated Ghost thoroughly so that she can capture him since she was able to bring this up even though she hadn’t planned on meeting Cordelia. In that case, this invitation was a godsend to Cordelia.

Catching Ghost was the only way she could really break away from 『Cordelia』.

She had felt Ghost's presence again because of what had happened with Shelley, so it wouldn't be surprising if he appeared before her again in the near future.

I won't let him get away this time.

Thinking that, she didn't have any reason to refuse.

"Rufina-sama, what do you want from me?"

Rufina smiled at Cordelia's words.

"Let's see... First of all, I want us to go to town."

"... Excuse me?"

Cordelia blinked at Rufina's eccentric reply.

"Rufina-dono. Surely that was a joke?"

Sylvester spoke in place of Cordelia who didn't know how to answer. But Rufina still had a smile on her face.

"Of course, I'm not joking. I also want to visit town and do some shopping together with a woman. If you secretly assign guards to me, then I'll sneak off."

"But..."

"My bad, Sylvester-dono. You might want to come with us, but you can't come into a store that sells underwear, can you?"

"Rufina-dono, please learn what discreet means."

Rufina must speak like this on a regular basis since the serious Sylvester didn't seem like he was panicking at all.

"I hid my identity while traveling, but I entered this kingdom legitimately under my real name. I'm free to do what I want as long as it's within the laws of this kingdom, and you know that I'm not weak in the first place. I had to train every day to avoid being assassinated in the palace."

"Speaking of which, I don't see your guard, Rufina-sama."

"Some of them are under my brother, so I left them behind. Well, they'll probably be here tomorrow."

Cordelia understood that Rufina, who had just informed them about her brutal relationship with her brother, wasn't worried about being in this kingdom even though Crista and Dulaus don't have good relations. At the same time, she also thought that it would be difficult to come up with a reason to stop Rufina from taking a stroll.

"Your Highness, the security in town isn't that bad. Even I can show her around."

Cordelia almost never went out alone, but that didn't mean that she didn't go out. She felt that it would be more dangerous to let Rufina go out on the streets alone. It didn't seem like Rufina would get offended by anything, but she might cause chaos for those around her because of her wilfulness.

Sylvester had given up. He sighed and looked at Cordelia.

“I’m sorry, but can you give me your hand? I think the left one should be fine.”

“Okay.”

“This is mine. It’ll protect you.”

He slid his bracelet onto her hand. It was very similar to the one Cordelia had received from Gille.

“I’d like to continue our conversation when you return that to me.”

She felt like that was also the answer to the question she had asked in the greenhouse.

It was difficult to talk more about this in front of Rufina, but Cordelia didn’t even know what to say to him in the first place.

Using guiding Rufina around town as an excuse, Cordelia left the castle as if she was running away.

Act 64: People who Inherited Red Eyes and the Encounter

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

If we go into town, then we will probably go to the noble district, ——— was what Cordelia had thought, but Rufina wanted to see how the common people lived.

Unlike Rufina, who was dressed in travelling clothes, Cordelia had changed into a dress for her attendance at the castle, therefore she brought a cheap stole so that she wouldn't stand out. However, she still felt uncomfortable since she still stood out in the commoner district.

"It's a lively city, isn't it?"

"Is it different from your kingdom after all?"

"Our capital city is for the nobles. There are commoners living there, but it feels different. Well, it isn't bad over there either, but it will probably take some time before I can invite you there."

"I'm glad you didn't say it was impossible for me to visit."

Rufina chuckled at Cordelia's words.

"As I thought, you are interesting."

When Rufina said that, Cordelia heard the sound of her stomach rumble.

Cordelia and Rufina kept looking at each other, but Rufina eventually started laughing.

"Sorry. It seems like I'm hungry."

"It's alright. It does smell nice around here."

There was a sandwich stall nearby which served thick slices of grilled bacon between bagels.

"But you don't eat while standing since you're a Princess, right?"

"Eating while standing? That's also fun. Luckily, we don't have any guards with us right now."

Cordelia was hesitant to stand and eat in a crowd, so she brought bagels from the stall and then they stopped by the nearby park at Rufina's request. There weren't many people around the park, but there were a lot of trees and shade to rest under.

Cordelia sat down on a bench then handed Rufina one of the bagels she had purchased. However, Rufina stared at the bagel with a somewhat puzzled expression on her face.

(... Perhaps.)

Cordelia said one phrase, "Pardon me," before taking a bite of the bagel in her hand and held it out to Rufina.

"I'm sorry for bothering you. I'm sure there's nothing to worry about, but I'm not used to eating something before it's tested for poison."

“I already ate a lot in a single bite.”

Rufina had said that she was used to being nearly killed, so Cordelia thought that perhaps she needed a poison tester, and it seemed like she was right.

Rufina also took a bite from the bagel that had been bitten into.

“... It’s tasty.”

“I’m glad to hear that.”

“But there are many good-natured people in this kingdom. If Sylvester-dono had a brother then I would have loved to take him as a husband, but I would also like to have you as a husband had you been a man.”

Cordelia rolled her eyes at those words, but Rufina continued without care.

“Sylvester-dono will probably become a good king. I’ve known him for three years, but I know very well that he doesn’t have to worry about anything since he’s rounded up a lot of good people. The neighbouring kingdoms aren’t pleased that he’s too smart, but if it weren’t for him, then my plan probably wouldn’t have worked.”

“You’re right.”

“Honestly, we had invaded Crista in the past, but if we were to invade now, Crista has enough power to push back. Therefore, I had to accept a lot of conditions, but he was still able to convince others behind the scene to agree with the conditions. He must have been thinking about the people. He wants to reduce the burden on the northern border by crushing the flames of war to have a bright future.”

“...”

“What? Are you not happy?”

“It seems like something that’s happening far away...”

Cordelia had no way of knowing such a thing since she avoided him, and the things that happened to Sylvester were completely different from Cordelia’s daily life, so she didn’t know what to say. As a citizen of this kingdom, she knew that she should be happy about this. However, she felt complicated about asking this since it was likely that Sylvester was Gille.

“This is quite interesting. He said he couldn’t lose to a lady and wanted to be proud. I thought he was talking about you, but am I wrong?”

“... I have never had such conversations with His Highness.”

“I see. Well, it has nothing to do with me. But even if he wasn’t talking about you, I’m personally interested in you. Ghost is probably interested in you as well because of your red eyes.”

Cordelia gulped a little at those words.

“So, it wasn’t a mistake when you said 『red-eyed brethren』 some time ago?”

Rufina narrowed her eyes at Cordelia’s question.

“When I see your red eyes, I think that it would have been great if I had a sister like you. The Pameradia’s are descendants of a nomad tribe, right? But have you heard about who they were before that?”

“No.”

“Your ancestors were originally part of Dulaus’s royal family.”

This was the first time that Cordelia had heard this.

“Dulaus’s royal family... you say?”

“Well, it was so long ago that I don’t even consider you my relative. It all started when the man who should be considered as your founder disagreed with the royal family and left the kingdom.”

Cordelia had never heard this from Elvis, but judging from the look on Rufina’s face, she wasn’t joking either.

“The Dulaus royal family also originally excelled in plant magic. But they lost that power as a result of favouring direct attack magic that gave them an advantage in war. That’s the reason why the royals are revered as royalty. They couldn’t even cope with the food shortage. And, foolish kings continued to ascend the throne.”

The way Rufina said it made it seemed as if she was mocking the Dulaus royal family.

“Well, thanks to them, I look smart so isn’t it great? Doesn’t it seem like this stage was set for me?”

“... I see.”

“Well, that’s far from praise, isn’t it annoying? Having said that, it’s not nice to suddenly be told that kind of thing. But then again, Ghost is also similar.”

“Excuse me?”

“He is also from the royal lineage. Unlike your family, he seems to be descended from a man who was executed for betrayal several generations ago. I haven’t told Sylvester-dono this yet.”

Cordelia stared at Rufina wondering if that was the reason why she wanted to go out with her without guards and Rufina nodded. She seemed to have understood Cordelia’s thoughts.

“I don’t know what he’s thinking, but he once told me that he was getting in my way because 『It’s seems interesting and you’re from the same red-eyed family as me』 . If it’s because of my red eyes, then I thought he might be obsessed with you too.”

“Because of my red-eyes...?”

“Even though Earl Pameradia’s sons also have red eyes, I’ve heard that they’re very skilled in martial arts, so I don’t think Ghost would go near them. But, you’re different from them. Even if he appears before me, it seems like it would be harder to catch him than get in contact with my brother. It’ll be tough.”

Cordelia was a little troubled by Rufina’s testy look.

(Ghost told me that he knew about me when we first met. But I never asked him when he heard about me.)

But still, I'm not convinced that that's why he approached me.

If people with red eyes have poor combat skills, then my sister Malvina is the same. But I haven't heard anything about this from her. Maybe Rufina-sama thinks that I'm worth mocking, but what she said bothers me.

“We might have had the same ancestors in the past. But from what I've heard, a lot of time has passed since my family left Dulaus Kingdom. Our origins trace back to before the founding of Crista Kingdom, so I think it would be difficult to say that I'm from the same red-eyed family as Rufina-sama.”

“You're right. But he has shown himself in front of you, has he not?”

She's not wrong.

Cordelia has been involved with Ghost three times in the past.

Although Cordelia wasn't convinced by the things Rufina had said, she couldn't find a reason to deny this no matter how much she thought.

(It makes me uneasy that Ghost appeared in front of Rufina-sama... This supports Rufina-sama's claim of him approaching people with 『red eyes』 .

Ghost had said that he didn't want to approach the Crista Kingdom's castle because it's heavily guarded. Nevertheless, he approached Rufina-sama, who is probably just as heavily guarded because she's a part of the royal family. He approached her even though she always has her guard up to the point where she won't eat something unless it's tasted for poison first.

(He's someone who watches things happen from a safe distance. It's too inconsistent for him to approach Rufina-sama unless he has a reason to. But is that reason really because of her eye colour?)

Even though that question came to her mind, she couldn't think of another reason.

“You don't seem convinced. Well, it's no surprise.”

“To be honest, the Ghost who I confronted and the Ghost who you spoke off seem completely different. But no matter the reason, the problem will go away when he is caught.”

“That's a very promising thing to say. Then, I'll be relying on you when the time comes. I'm not asking you to catch him directly. But if you do have the chance to catch him, then I hope you would put that as your top priority. Even —— if you have to risk my safety.”

“Rufina-sama...?”

Does that mean the operation has already begun? When Cordelia was about to ask that, strong wind blew in the area along with an unpleasant feeling. Cordelia knew straight away that this wind wasn't natural and had been conjured up with magic.

Cordelia stood up and stood so that she was protecting Rufina with her back. She remembered that Rufina had called herself strong, but still, she couldn't let an important person from another kingdom face Ghost.

However, Rufina was also confident and running away didn't seem like an option to her.

"The fool has appeared at last."

"The way you say makes it seem like you went out of your way to pick a secluded spot to invite me here. Well, I'll go along with it though."

The person who had emerged from behind the trees after Rufina spoke was the person Cordelia had expected to see ——— Ghost.

Cordelia widened her eyes in surprise since Rufina sounded like she knew that Ghost would come here.



(Did Rufina-sama use herself as bait to lure out Ghost...?)

Why did she do something so sudden?

Cordelia couldn't feel any guards hidden nearby. Rufina hadn't asked for Sylvester's help and did this on her own. She could feel the presence of civilians nearby, but she couldn't get them involved with this. The unnatural wind that Ghost had summoned seemed to be stopping sound from leaking out.

Cordelia panicked while not letting this show on her face and Ghost let out a low laughter.

"It seems like it would be interesting to push Dulaus's Princess into despair when her dearest wish had been fulfilled, so I've been looking for the chance to do so, but ——— I didn't think that two red-eyed girls would be waiting for me. What a fun miscalculation."

Rufina laughed at the amused Ghost.

"It's a pleasant miscalculation for us too. Normally, you wouldn't show yourself in vain like this. Were you lured by two red-eyed beauties?"

Rufina boosted her magic while spitting out words that seemed as if they were spoken lightly.

"Well, normally I wouldn't think it's interesting to appear myself, but I thought it would be fun since you went out of your way to invite me like this."

"Then, I'll give you something called a judgment. Feel free to receive it."

Cordelia looked around while listening to the two talk.

There weren't many people around just like when they had arrived here. Which meant that they wouldn't get any civilians involved in this situation, but at the same time, she couldn't ask for help.

Cordelia knew that she didn't have the means to catch Ghost directly, but there was a lot of greenery in this park ——— so it was possible for her to at least stop him.

"Rufina-sama."

"Cordelia-sama, cover me. I'll catch that."

Even though Rufina had said that, Cordelia had no idea what kind of strategy Rufina would use. Rufina was used to it since she said she trained every day, but Cordelia didn't even know what kind of magic Rufina could use. But the uncomfortable feeling remained within her.

(Ghost is quick at getting away, so he wouldn't appear in front of an opponent who he would lose to. If he's interacted with Rufina-sama before now, then there's a good chance he knows about her abilities... In other words, he doesn't think he will lose.)

If so, then I can understand just how important my support is. But I can't understand why Rufina-sama forced herself to confront Ghost to this extent. Even if Rufina-sama is stronger, it's difficult to back her up from my position.

Besides, another uncomfortable feeling was swirling around in Cordelia's head.

(Ghost had given Ted false hope and encouraged Zakharov to follow his desires. If Shelley's curse was also the work of Ghost, then he liked to trick people with flattery.)

Even if he was looking for a chance to see if he could crush Rufina-sama's hopes, he's not manipulating people like he normally does to enjoy his cheap play. I can't help but feel that he's acting differently from the past since he showed up to fight Rufina-sama.

(But I shouldn't worry about that now.)

Cordelia tried to chase away her thoughts about Ghost while being nervous about Ghost's and Rufina's movement, and Ghost laughed.

"Well, that's how it will turn out, right?"

Then, Ghost jumped straight at Rufina without hesitation.

Cordelia concentrated all her magic, sent it flying towards the surrounding plants and trees, and tried to create a wall in front of Rufina.

But the movement she reached her hand out, she felt a strong gaze from Ghost.

"Try again."

She realised that Ghost was heading her direction almost at the same time she heard his voice.

She felt a severe impact on her stomach and couldn't even speak as air leaked out from her throat. However, she didn't lose her consciousness, but the impact was so great that Cordelia collapsed to the ground.

Rufina shouted at the same time.

"You!"

"You're a Princess, so don't raise your voice. Well, I'm sure you deliberately wanted yourself to be caught here, but I don't have any obligation to go along with that."

Cordelia withheld the pain, but her body wouldn't move well. She knew that she had to do something about Ghost since he was standing next to her, but she couldn't even take her hands off the ground.

However, Ghost's words threw her into confusion.

(Rufina-sama wasn't just luring him here, she wanted him to capture her? What's the meaning of this...?)

More importantly, I have to tell Rufina-sama to run away as soon as possible. She thought, but the only thing that escaped from her mouth was her breath.

"It's alright, Cordelia-san. I'll let Rufina get out of here unharmed. In return, you'll have to come with me for a bit. But, how disappointing. It seems like Cordelia-san has realised something."

"Ghost, you...!"

"Don't look like that, Rufina. It's your fault after all. Ah, stay away. I don't want to kill Cordelia-san right now, but I might slip."

“Why do you want her?! If you want to undo my efforts, then you should come after me!”

Rufina roared and Ghost laughed.

“I’ll come out if Rufina and Cordelia-san are together ——— that much is correct. Even if I want to crush your dreams, you don’t think that I would do this directly, do you? Did you think I would target you because you’re from the royal family? Or were you in such a rush that you overlooked a lot of things?”

Cordelia couldn’t see Ghost’s expression since she couldn’t look up. However, it was easy for her to guess that he was enjoying himself.

“I told you, didn’t I? 『It seems like it would be interesting to push Dulaus’s Princess into despair when her dearest wish had been fulfilled』 . I don’t think you would give up if I got in your way, but what if something were to happen to 『Cordelia-san, who is subjected to the Princess’s selfishness』 ? If the people of this kingdom think that something happened to Cordelia-san because you took her out, then they would be furious. And it would be even more interesting if they think that you let me kidnap her. Even if the people aren’t angry, Earl Pameradia won’t let this go. If things were to get more severe, then it could lead to war.”

Cordelia widened her eyes at those words.

“If you want Cordelia-san to return safely, then tell Sylvester to come to me alone. I’ll be waiting for him at the cabin up the creek in Argel Forest. I’ll wait for him until tomorrow, so do tell him to come alone.”

Cordelia’s vision went black immediately after she tried to say that Sylvester wasn’t involved in this.

Act 65: Person with Strong Feelings

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Cordelia wasn't sure if her head hurt or her stomach hurt, but at any rate, she felt sick.

She opened her eyes while feeling bad and saw a wooden floor, which woke her up at once. She didn't know where she was but being in a dark room with her hands tied behind her back made her realise her situation.

"You're awake. How are you feeling?"

"Horrible."

Cordelia was relieved that her voice came out clearer than she had expected it to.

"It's fine if you cry a little. How strong."

"Would you let me go if I cry? If not, then there's no reason to make you happy."

"You mean you don't want to expend your energy? You're no fun."

Ghost spoke to Cordelia in a friendly manner, but she didn't feel as if he had let his guard down at all. Rather, she felt as if he was more alert.

(There are no plants in this room. He said this was Argel Forest, so I'm sure there are some plants outside... But I guess I have to stop Ghost before I invoke remote magic.)

The windows were closed and they were horizontally projected windows, so it was impossible for her to project her magic and aim for the plants outside.

Cordelia got up and leaned against the wall.

Her hands were probably tied with hemp rope. Her hands were prickled by the loose strings, and it was painfully tight, but she would be able to cut through the rope thanks to the analytical magic that she had always had a hard time with in the past.

But this wasn't the time to feel relief.

(Even Ghost would be able to detect it if I invoke my magic. So, I don't have time to spare after I cut the rope. I have to find the right time...)

Ghost will put up his guard more if I fail. Cordelia understood the difference between Ghost's and her own fighting ability.

Perhaps because she thought that and was obedient, Ghost's mood improved.

"We still have a little time before tomorrow comes. We have time, so why don't we talk for a bit? I think it would be a nice change of pace, and I want to see your reaction. Ah, I knocked out Rufina for a bit after that, but I don't think she would be knocked out for very long, so I'm sure your situation has been safely conveyed to the royal castle."

“...”

Cordelia kept her face down, trying to keep her expression as unnoticeable as possible. She didn't want to listen to Ghost talk, but she didn't have any reason to refuse since she thought it might create a chance for her to escape. Ghost didn't seem to particularly care that she hadn't replied and began speaking again.

“Oh yes. Are you interested in the red-eyed Princess's, Rufina's, story?”

“...”

“Rufina is a foul-mouthed girl. She always talks big and isn't actually aiming for the throne. She's just a soft-hearted Princess.”

Cordelia nearly reacted involuntarily, but she stopped herself from doing so. Ghost watched Cordelia for a reaction. He might stop talking if he was asking her to tell him to continue.

Ghost continued speaking to the silent Cordelia.

“Rufina wanted me to kidnap her. By getting herself kidnapped, she could let Crista know that the Dulaus royal family wasn't cooperating with the Dark Guild, and so I wouldn't be able to interfere with the treaty no matter what I do. I'm sure she arranged the treaty so that it could be completed with her brother even if she were to die. She doesn't get along with her brother, but it's not like they're on bad terms. This was all part of her plan.”

Cordelia had only known Rufina for a short amount of time, so she couldn't determine whether Ghost's words were true or not. However, she knew that Ghost gained nothing from lying to her. Ghost was looking forward to Rufina's despair, so she felt that there was a certain amount of truth behind his words.

“Having said that, I'm not really interested in Rufina either. Cordelia-san, don't you have any questions for me? I'll answer them since you might not get this chance again.”

Ghost said and Cordelia slowly opened her mouth.

“Is it true that you're after us because of our red eyes?”

“Ah, Rufina told you that, didn't she? Honestly, I don't remember saying that ——— but I do think that it's amusing to see people, who have the same eyes as my ancestor, suffer.”

Ghost unexpectedly admitted it readily then continued happily.

“Well, I'm in this situation I'm in now because the royal family treated my ancestor from a few generations ago as a traitor. Thanks to that, I almost died many times before I gained any kind of strength and lived a life where I didn't know whether tomorrow would come or not. And yet, Rufina says naïve things like she won't eat a meal because one of her poison testers had died.”

Ghost confessed without flinching as if he was talking about someone else, and his mood seemed to get better and better.

“As for the Pameradia House, it was really a coincidence. But I got a little angry when I thought that it would have been great if my ancestor had acted like yours had. It was fun to watch you suffer, even though it wasn’t as fun as seeing Rufina struggle. It was also fun to see the bad guys being defeated by you. I was killing three birds with one stone.”

Ghost stopped there and stood up. Then he walked up to Cordelia and bent down to meet her eye level.

“You and Rufina have done a lot of things, but in the end, you two were able to do the things you did because you were born into those Houses. I enjoyed seeing you two suffer and look at me with hatred. That’s the greatest distraction. But the most interesting thing lately wasn’t you or Rufina, it was Shelley.”

“Eh?”

Cordelia’s surprise put Ghost in a good mood and the corners of his lips bent upwards.

“I couldn’t stomach it. It’s too convenient to be able to rise up in society just because she sleeps and dreams, right? That’s why I decided to show her how tough the world can be.”

“You...! That’s why you tricked her?!”

“You make me look bad by saying that. She was seriously considering using any means possible to expose a person’s true nature, so I just taught her a fun spell. It’s not a lie that a lot of people tell the truth when they’re about to die, and Shelley herself wasn’t going to die from it. Well, wasn’t it a good lesson for her?”

Cordelia felt that she had to deal with him calmly when she heard his somewhat happy words, but at the same time, she was seething with anger.

She didn’t know his reasoning was the same when he tricked the in-game 『Cordelia』 and approached Shelley. Cordelia also didn’t think that the in-game 『Cordelia』 or Shelley did the right thing.

But ———.

“You? Teaching people something? Stop joking around! You were only having fun fostering her rampage and watching her crumble!”

“Why are you angry, Cordelia-san? You don’t like her either, do you? You didn’t die, and the bad lady got her punishment. I think you should be grateful for this result.”

“Do you not realise it? You’re just like Shelley. If you don’t care about what happens to the people you can’t stand, then you’re both the same. I can still sympathise with her because she had a motive.”

“... You must be confident that help will come since you dare to defy me in this situation. Do you really think that Sylvester would come alone, Captive Princess?”

He must have thought she was calling him a sore loser because he looked at her weirdly.

Cordelia smiled widely at Ghost.

“There’s no way he’s coming.”

“Huh?”

Cordelia felt a little satisfied when she saw his surprise, but at the same time, she was calm again.

“I would have to beat His Highness up if he puts himself at risk and responds to the demands of the kidnapper. The Pameradia House is also a lot more composed than you think. They certainly won’t act the way you want them to even if something were to happen to me. You shouldn’t underestimate them too much.”

“Eeh. You know that and yet you act calm. Are you an idiot?”

“I want to be smarter than you.”

Cordelia regained her composure and Ghost widened his eyes then chuckled.

“I should stop waiting for the next day to come after all. There’s no point in waiting if Sylvester doesn’t show up. And I might be able to see something interesting if he were to come and you weren’t fine.”

“Oh my, I thought you don’t lie to people.”

“It’s fine once in a while, right? I might just accidentally kill you if you keep talking.”

Despite his words, Ghost didn’t seem like he would do anything to Cordelia straight away. It seemed like he was holding back from almost being provoked. But it wasn’t like Ghost to stop a conversation when he was in an overwhelming favourable position.

(But then I have a chance to win. Ghost is raging with anger right now; his magic isn’t stable, and he lacks composure.)

If I get the right timing, then my chances of escaping from here would increase. This was the forest, as long as she ran through the door, she would be in an advantageous place to invoke her magic.

(I don’t believe His Highness will come, and he shouldn’t. But ——— I believe that someone will come.)

Then the biggest counterattack that she could do right now was get herself away from being a hostage before then.

Ghost had said that it was almost the next day. So, if help was coming, then they will be here soon.

I know that it won’t turn out the way he wants even if I don’t make it out of here alive. But I also don’t expect to be abandoned.

And ——— there are people who will be sad if I don’t make it back. Sylvester-sama will also regret not coming to my rescue.

Even if I can get out of this hostage situation, it’s probably impossible for me to escape through the forest because of the difference in our strength. But, if I can just get out of this place, then there’s hope.

When Cordelia concentrated to ensure she had the chance to escape, the old hinges made a squeaking sound, and the door at the entrance opened slowly.

The door hadn’t been opened by the wind, but there was no one there.

Ghost turned his back to Cordelia having lost his enthusiasm. Still, that didn't mean he had let his guard down, so she couldn't act carelessly, but she understood the situation.

(This is Gille-sama's magic...?)

Cordelia knew that Gille used magic that hid his presence. She also couldn't sense him, but the bracelet she had borrowed responded warmly as if to prove that he was there.

(Why did he really come alone...?!)

But that thought immediately disappeared from her mind. The current situation didn't change even if she knew the reason.

(Then... Then I definitely won't miss the chance that he's created for me!)

Cordelia immediately activated her magic and cut the rope that bound her hands. At the same time, the door opened violently.

Ghost hesitated for a moment because the things that were occurring in front and behind him were beyond his expectations. Seeing this, Cordelia couldn't help but smile at the fact that the surprise attack had worked.

But Ghost set his eyes on Cordelia, who was less powerful than him, rather than explore the unexplained events. Perhaps because of his accumulated anger, Ghost came at Cordelia with the intent to hurt her.

Cordelia was still frozen as she channelled her magic into her numb arm. She had learnt magic for self-defence even though it wasn't as good as her plant magic. She may need to be prepared to break a bone, but she had to believe that she could withstand a frontal attack. If she could, then there should be an opening behind Ghost.

(I'll leave it to you then, Gille-sama!)

But then in the next moment, a dull sound echoed through the room and Ghost was brought down to one knee. Still, Ghost jumped back to the side and banged on the window to clear a path outside.

However, the window didn't open.

Ghost widened his eyes and clicked his tongue and a look of impatience showed on his face for the first time ever.

(Is Gille-sama also the reason why the window won't open...?)

Ghost looked as if he couldn't acknowledge that he was struggling.

But a breeze swept through the room at the same time as when Ghost chuckled. That wind destroyed the lamps and extinguished the lights in the room. Cordelia's vision turned black.

(Not good...!)

Ghost would close the distance between him and Cordelia in a mere two seconds. Cordelia panicked since she had to face an agitated and invisible opponent, but the room turned completely silent after she heard a moan.

(What happened...?)

Cordelia was confused but she didn't feel anything unpleasant in the room. *Did that moan come from Ghost?*

When she thought that, she was enveloped by a warm but firm grip.

She knew this feeling.

"I made it this time."

Followed by the voice that reached her ears, she heard the sound of a mask rolling onto the floor with a clank. She couldn't see around her yet, but she realised that he had taken off his mask when she felt the warmth against her cheek.

"Why are you here?"

"Because I heard what happened from Rufina-dono. I couldn't leave without telling anyone, so I told Vernoux and Clive. They were furious."

"Of course, they would be."

"But... I had to come when I thought that something might happen to you because I sent someone else."

"But it's too dangerous."

"I know. But I couldn't sit still when I thought that I was the cause for your involvement."

"Gosh... Rufina-dono said that you would be a good king..."

Cordelia didn't even have time to worry about the fact that she sounded more hoarse than angry.

She was just relieved.

"Wait a minute. I can't just leave him like that even though he's knocked out, but I need to light the room first."

Sylvester moved away from Cordelia and pulled out a round sphere from his pocket. He placed it on the floor, then the sphere emitted light and lit up the room.

Cordelia recalled the planetarium that Gille had made for her in the past. But what was illuminated in this room wasn't stars, but an unconscious Ghost.

Sylvester placed handcuffs on the unconscious Ghost.

"I've sealed his magic and I'll tie his feet together as well. I don't think he'll run away before backup arrives. Vernoux, who is acting as 『Sylvester』, will dispatch the guards an hour after I've left."

"Vernoux-sama is acting as you?"

“The Flantheim House is good at transformation magic as evidence from the fact that he can change me into 『Gille』 . Vernoux can probably turn into anyone he wants.”

“Even so...”

“Vernoux told me this when I left the castle. 『If you don't return, then 『Vernoux』 will die and Your Highness won't, but you won't ask me to take your place forever, right?』 ”

“I have to apologise to Vernoux-sama when we get back.”

“Yes.”

Vernoux spoke frivolously like always, but she could tell that he was worried. Above all, she couldn't thank him enough when she found out that he was risking his life as well.

“More importantly, are you injured Dilly?”

“... No.”

She wasn't injured. But it felt uncomfortable for him to call her Dilly even though she knew in her mind that 『Gille』 was 『Sylvester』 .

Sylvester sensed her discomfort and smiled wryly.

“I'll take you home after I hand Ghost to the guards. But... there is a place that I really want to take you to. The road is a little rough, but it's not out of the way, in fact, it might be a bypass, so you'll get home faster.”

“A place you want to take me...?”

“—— Star Falling Hill. Do you remember?”

Sylvester smiled shyly and Cordelia saw the smile of the 12 year-old Gille overlap with his.

Act 66: 『Sylvester』

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

The large, bluish full moon lit the area brighter than usual. Looking up from the unobstructed meadows, many stars shone brightly in the sky and their light didn't lose to the moon's.

Cordelia and Sylvester travelled from the forest to the hill on the black horse that Sylvester had ridden. He had dismounted his horse a short distance away from the hut to avoid being noticed by Ghost, but the black horse was docile and waited for his return.

When they reached their destination, Cordelia followed quietly after Sylvester as he walked ahead with a light in hand.

“We're here.”

Cordelia stopped when she heard those words and followed Sylvester's gaze to the place he was pointing at.

Then, she saw a place filled with white budded jasmine.

Perhaps because of the influence of the earth's magic, the flowers seemed to be mysteriously floating and seemed covered in a slight light.

“Beautiful.”

Cordelia couldn't help but say, and Sylvester smiled.

“This can only be seen at night. I've always thought that you would be happy to see this place ever since I first saw it.”

But Sylvester immediately stiffened.

“... I'm sorry for not telling you all this time. And once again, I am 『Gille』 and 『Sylvester』 .”

“Ah, hmm... I'm Cordelia.”

“I know that.”

Cordelia wasn't telling a joke either, she just didn't know what to say and inadvertently introduced herself. She didn't know what expression she had on her face, but Sylvester chuckled.

“I actually meant to tell you sooner. But I couldn't say it.”

“Why... is that?”

I have been avoiding Sylvester-sama all this time, and I'm sure we would only have bland conversations had he revealed his identity sooner. As a result, Gille-sama's silence about who he was, made him my close friend. As for Shelley, it's possible that she would have bothered me like she did even if I didn't get acquainted with Sylvester-sama.

Still, it bothers me that Sylvester-sama had kept quiet about his identity and that Vernoux-sama had helped him to trick me. I also feel like my childhood friends have left me out of the circle.

As she thought this, Sylvester said something surprising.

“Because you don’t like people who lie, right Dilly?”

“... Excuse me?”

“Dilly likes knights and people who don’t lie. That’s what Vernoux told me.”

Even if you say that, I don’t remember ever saying something like that. However, if Vernoux-sama had asked me this at some point, then I might have answered without giving it much thought...

Cordelia put her hand to her mouth and tried to recall her memories and Sylvester continued.

“I also heard that you respected my father’s reign, but you’re not interested in me.”

“... I don’t remember this. But I’m sorry if I’ve offended you.”

Those things are the truth, but I wouldn’t be surprised if I said something similar to that. I always insist that 『I’m not interested in Sylvester-sama, so I won’t get close to him』, but I never imagined that the person himself would hear about this. There’s nothing more embarrassing than this.

“I thought it was natural for you not to be interested in me, since I was a helpless child at that time. So, I studied and trained hard to get you interested in 『Sylvester』, then I was going to reveal myself... But you continued to show no interest in me, so I continued to act as 『Gille』, but then I started to get impatient. I thought too much and wondered what you’d think of me after I revealed myself to you with the way things were.”

“Huh?”

“Dilly, it’s not that you’re not interested in Sylvester, but you were avoiding him, weren’t you?”

Cordelia froze since he had guessed correctly.

“Why...?”

“I also didn’t understand why you were avoiding me at first. You said you weren’t interested in me, but you also didn’t say you hated me, and I’ve never done anything you hated as 『Sylvester』.”

Cordelia certainly kept a safe distance from Sylvester.

“That’s why I didn’t say anything unnecessary. But I realised it thanks to Clydereine-jou. There’s a lot of trouble around me and not everyone gets close to me because they want to. So, it wasn’t strange for you to keep your distance.”

That was slightly different from why Cordelia had avoided him, but from Sylvester’s point of view, the result was the same. Either way, she felt bad that Sylvester was trying to tell her the truth even after he understood this.

“But then I grew even more impatient when you returned to the royal capital.”

“Why were you impatient?”

“Because you’ve become really beautiful.”

“Huh? Wh-what are you saying all of a sudden!?”

Cordelia quickly squeezed her words out while feeling her face heat up from his sudden words. However, Sylvester wasn’t surprised by anything and remained calm.

“I was afraid that someone would take you away from me if I didn’t tell you the truth sooner. So, I knew that I needed to improve myself so that I could tell you the truth about me being 『Sylvester』, but you experienced something unpleasant because of me.”

Cordelia slowly felt as if she was being confessed to, but she quickly calmed herself down, thinking that it was just her imagination.

She had always thought Gille was a natural airhead. Even now, she was sure that he was saying that if Cordelia had a fiancé then she would probably meet with her male friends less. She was sure of it.

“I thought it’d best for me to stay away from you if I cared about you. You always worked hard and shined everywhere. But... I didn’t want to do that unless you made it clear that you 『hated』 me.”

“... I’m also happy to have been able to meet you, Gille-sama. You’re a very dear friend.”

I also think that it was convenient for me to avoid him, but even if I know that Gille-sama and Sylvester-sama are the same person, it’s awkward to look him directly in the eye because of my conditioned reflexes.

But he is definitely 『Gille-sama』, since he came to my rescue and I can talk to him like this. When she thought like that, she mysteriously stopped caring about Sylvester’s appearance.

But Sylvester shook his head slightly.

“You might think of me as a dear friend, but I don’t.”

“What do you mean?”

Cordelia tilted her head in confusion and Sylvester smiled softly.

“You have always been my first love.”



His firm voice rode the wind and reached her ears.

I didn't mishear him.

But Cordelia couldn't reply since it was too bizarre.

"I'm not asking you for an immediate reply. However, if you don't want to see my face anymore, then don't hesitate to tell me this as soon as possible. I'll give up if you tell me this directly. I don't want to make you feel bad."

Sylvester said as he smiled. Cordelia thought that he was slowly straightening his back, but he immediately fell on his back.

"Y-your Highness?!"

Sylvester put a calm expression on his face as Cordelia bent down in surprise.

"I said it. I haven't been able to say it for eight years, so I'm spent."

"Excuse me?"

"Well, I'll talk about it another time."

Eight years. Isn't that when we first met?

"It's extremely rare for you to have a silly expression on your face."

"What!?"

"You don't need to hide."

Sylvester squinted his eyes when he saw Cordelia cover her face with her hand and got up.

"But it feels really good. I was worried about keeping silent about this, and I thought you might hate me, but I'm relieved to see that you're worried about me. As I thought, you're still you."

"What does that mean?"

"Exactly what I said. But I've let it out now so prepare yourself."

"What...?"

"Like I said before, I'm not asking for an answer straight away and I'll give up if you want me to. But I won't hold back if that's not the case."

Cordelia couldn't help but avert her eyes away from the gaze that was directed at her.

Her heart was beating awfully loud.

She felt like the sound was turning her face redder and redder, and it didn't feel like it would stop even if she told herself to calm down.

(Neither Gille-sama or His Highness has ever looked at me like that!)

Her fierce heartbeat reminded her of the past; of the time when they danced together when they were twelve, and of the time when they went to visit Fulvia together, and Cordelia was getting more

confused. *I did think that he was kind and gentlemanly, but if that was because of some special feeling* _____.

Sylvester suddenly laughed as Cordelia was thinking.

“Wh-what’s wrong?”

“Seeing the look on your face right now, I’m really glad I said it. I wish I had told you sooner.”

“Don’t look at me! What expression are you saying I’m making?!”

“Probably the expression you’re thinking of... I’d really like to spend more time with you like this, but we have to go home. I’ve sent a messenger, but I’m sure they’ll be worried until they see your face.”

Then, Sylvester stood up and held his hand out to Cordelia. She quickly pulled back when their hands overlapped.

“Then... let’s go apologise first. Vernoux has informed Elvis about this, but I have to report to him as well.”

With those words, she felt her somewhat fluffy feeling suddenly return to reality.

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When they got back to the royal capital, Vernoux and Clive greeted them at the city walls.

Vernoux shrugged.

“I sent a messenger using His Highness’s appearance, but His Highness was at the scene, so the knights are rather confused. Did you come up with a good excuse so that our switch wouldn’t get found out?”

“Yup.”

“I see. Then, do you have an excuse for Earl Pameradia about why you’re back late even though you left first?”

“That would be a sincere apology.”

Vernoux seemed to know that they made a detour before coming back and that Cordelia knew that 『Gille』 and 『Sylvester』 was the same person.

Vernoux slowly approached them as Cordelia dismounted with the help of Sylvester, who had dismounted first.

Then, he put his arms around Cordelia and Sylvester’s necks.

“I’m glad. I was worried about you two.”

He frankly told them this as if he was sighing, and Cordelia froze for a moment since she felt guilty for worrying him and happy that he had worried about her, but her expression quickly faltered.

“I’m back.”

“I’m back.”

When Cordelia and Sylvester said that today, Vernoux let them go.

“Well, I’d like to say... that you should rest first but... Hey, Clay. Do you think it’s a long shot judging from how Earl Pameradia was acting when we explained the situation to him?”

“It’s not my place to say this, but I wouldn’t suggest that His Highness take Cordelia-jou home.”

Cordelia’s cheeks twitched when she heard Clive’s words. Of course, she knew Elvis would be angry, but the expressions on Vernoux and Clive’s faces said more than their words did.

“... Your Highness. I can go home by myself from here. I’ll explain the situation to Otou-sama.”

She didn’t think that Elvis would take his anger out on Sylvester, but she couldn’t be sure.

However, Sylvester shook his head.

“It’s dark, so I’ll take you home. Besides, I still think that I need to tell Elvis this properly.”

“Dilly, give up. His Highness won’t listen once he’s made up his mind. That was the case when he went incognito. If he was the kind of guy who easily backed off in the first place, then he wouldn’t have gone to the forest alone.”

Aren’t you the one who invited him to go incognito? Cordelia wanted to say, but she didn’t have time to spare. She could only hope that the discussion would end peacefully.

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Something felt out of the ordinary in her familiar house even though it was only dark outside.

The thing that Cordelia felt most unfamiliar with in this situation was that the head of the house, Elvis, was standing outside the gate.

Elvis’s expression was different from what she had imagined and didn’t contain a fierce rage. However, she could feel a quiet, icy anger coming from him and her legs felt weak.

“I’m back.”

Cordelia kept her voice firm to keep it from shaking.

She knew it was inevitable that he would be angry, but she couldn’t think of any way to appease his anger. So, she told herself that she should accept whatever he threw at her without shame even if he was angry.

However, Elvis’s gaze went straight to Sylvester and he didn’t even look at Cordelia.

“I’ve heard all about it from Marquis Flantheim and Marquis Eames’s House. Your Highness. I would like to complain that your conduct of endangering yourself was very foolish.”

He said that without any reservations whatsoever.

But Elvis's words didn't end there.

"... But as a father, I would like to thank you deeply for bringing my daughter home safely."

Cordelia and Sylvester widened their eyes at Elvis, who was bowing deeply, then Sylvester quickly shook his head.

"I was expecting more of a scolding."

"You are not a child anymore, Your Highness. If you've decided for yourself that that was the right thing to do, then all I can offer is my opinion."

"That means... you'll give up on me if I continue to act too selfish, right? I'll be careful."

Elvis spoke plainly and was still as expressionless as ever, but the coldness Cordelia felt earlier was already gone.

"But then, no matter what I think, I'm sure there are those who were inspired by what you did."

Elvis replied to Sylvester in an indirect way and Cordelia smiled a little.

"Elvis. Can I ask you something?"

"What is it?"

"Will you allow me to make Cordelia my Queen if I can persuade her?"

Cordelia stopped thinking completely when she heard those words.

"Of course, I won't force her if she doesn't want to. I'm not going to tell Their Majesties about this, so you can think of this as my personal wish and not that of the royal family's."

Cordelia glanced at Elvis and although his expression hadn't changed, she felt as if something black was coming out from behind him. That probably wasn't because it was night-time.



“... Three years.”

“Three years?”

“My daughter has just made her debut in high society and I don’t plan on marrying her off to anyone for at least three years.”

To anyone, of course, included Sylvester. This was the first time Cordelia had heard this and Elvis’s voice had said that in a really low voice, but Sylvester didn’t flinch at all.

“That’s a relief then. I’ll also try my best to gain her favour in the meantime. I don’t know what my parents will say if I take too long.”

“...”

Elvis didn’t reject Sylvester because he approved of him to a certain point, but he didn’t accept him either.

Rather, his mood seemed to rapidly worsen.

“My daughter has matured a lot from the time she was little. But with all due respect, I don’t know if my daughter would be satisfied even if it were you, Your Highness.”

“Hm, Otou-sama...!”

“I know. That’s why I’ve been doing my best not to lose to Dilly.”

“Even you, Gille-sama...!”

But Cordelia was startled by her own words as she rushed to stop Sylvester.

She had said that because of what he had said, but she felt a strong gaze from Elvis. Cordelia smiled while twitching since his gaze was asking her when they had gotten close enough to call each other by nicknames.

Even her appearance like that seemed to amuse Sylvester.

“I told you, didn’t I? Prepare yourself.”

She felt that the smile that Sylvester had on his face at that moment was a little meaner than it had been in the past.

But, it was a gentle and serene smile which made her think that he was still the same even though his appearance was different.

Act 67: Each of Their Paths

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Two years have passed since that long day.

Sylvester had declared that Cordelia should prepare herself, but they continued their peaceful relationship and not much had changed.

Cordelia met with Sylvester more after she found out that he was Gille. For example, when she visited the Big Bookcase, Sylvester would invite her to the greenhouse or gardens to have tea with him. It wasn't just always the two of them, Vernoux and Clive often joined them for tea as well. Other than that, they also exchanged letters like they had when he was Gille.

However, that didn't mean that nothing had changed.

Sylvester would visit the Pameradia household alone, and sometimes he would change into Gille and they would go out. As expected, Cordelia didn't think it was a good idea for Sylvester to wander around without a guard and complained bitterly about it when he had first invited her to go out, but he boldly declared 『I'm used to going around incognito since I was a child, and it's too conspicuous for adults to go on dates with guards around』, so she couldn't stop him.

Cordelia knew that they were going on dates even if her reply was prevaricating, but to be told this gave her an indescribable nagging feeling. Perhaps because she hadn't stopped him from going out, he would tell her, "It was fine before, wasn't it?" so she no longer had any words to stop him with.

Incidentally, whenever she went out with Sylvester, Cordelia also used Vernoux's magic to change into a different person. Gill and Vernoux were surprised that she had changed into a woman with black hair and eyes. Vernoux couldn't choose people's appearances when he used his magic on them, so it was surprising that her appearance made her look like Sylvester's sibling.

However, there are times when she was glad to go out with Sylvester.

She felt happiest about this when Sylvester asked her, "Will you listen to the story about my first love?"

She could only say that she was curious when asked, but if she had been in public, then she would hesitate to say it honestly.

According to Sylvester, he first saw Cordelia even before she had met 『Gille』. Cordelia had also heard that Sylvester came to the Pameradia mansion when the Queen visited the greenhouse. However, she had no way of knowing that her appearance while she was researching would captivate him.

"I was really disappointed when my mother told me not to talk to you then. But I didn't realise that it was love at first sight until much later. At first, I just wanted to talk to the girl more and spend time with her. I also thought that it was unfair that Vernoux was close with you."

"... Love at first sight?"

"If it had only been love at first sight, then I probably wouldn't have realised that you were my first love. When you scolded me on the street, I couldn't say anything back and I thought I had done

something uncool, so I wrote you a letter, and I was happy that you wrote back to me. And from then, I wanted to talk to you more.”

When she heard that story at the park, she felt like cowering if only there weren't so many people around. Even so, she managed to maintain her composure, but Sylvester didn't hold back.

“I'm not rushing you for an answer. But, don't forget that I told you to prepare yourself.”

Those words had been incredibly embarrassing, and yet she was troubled since she wasn't put off by them. And she couldn't help but think that Sylvester often threw her off her pace.

As for the rose, Vernoux told her, 『You're really slow, aren't you?』 but she could only retort, 『I didn't think Gille-sama would know my real name, and that it was a coincidence. How was I to know that His Highness would go incognito with you?』

Looking back, although she had many childhood memories with Gille, the one that made her most conscious about was when he came alone as Sylvester to rescue her from Ghost.

Although Cordelia thought she could be calm about it, she couldn't help but realise how safe Sylvester made her feel as more time passed. Even now, the feelings she had at that time were becoming stronger.

(Even though I said I could deal with Gille-sama calmly when I was little... I'm also easily swayed.)

『You look like a hero to the girl you saved』, who would have thought that a day would come when I realise that the words I said to him on the day when he saved the flower girl would come true?

However, she couldn't help but think of that all the time lately.

(I think he was reliable at that time because he did his best in his studies and training, but I'm worried that he will keep pushing himself in the future.)

I was happy that he protected me, but it's not in my nature to be protected one-sidedly like a princess in a fairy-tale. It's a bit difficult to support him in terms of combat, but I can support him in other areas.

However, she felt that he was the only one doing things for her and she hadn't done anything for him.

She could think of a lot of things he had done for her including the rose 『Cordelia』, the place that he showed her incognito before she headed to Weltoria and the special scenery in Star Falling Hill.

In contrast, Cordelia only recalled giving him souvenirs and baked goods. Of course, he had been really satisfied with those things, but she wondered if she could have done something else for him as well when she thought about it.

When she thought like that, she wondered if being by Sylvester's side was the best way to grant her wish, but she didn't know if that could be called love. And she still couldn't decide if she could tell Sylvester that she wanted to be by his side with that kind of motive.

Additionally, there were also still some embarrassing memories in her mind. She was also conflicted about whether it was alright to move this fast since they've been together ever since they were young. *Shouldn't I be more careful in preparing my response? Sylvester-sama won't believe me if I reply too*

fast, right? Various thoughts swirled through her mind. Gille-sama said that I don't have to rush my answer, but is replying after two years still too fast? Since Otou-sama said that he won't marry me off for at least three years, should I wait until the three years are over before I reply? But I feel like it's already too late considering we already go out together.

Love is difficult after all.

Cordelia couldn't help but think.

Cordelia stepped into her shop and the bell at the door rang while she was thinking about the past.

Unlike the shop in the noble district, this was aimed at the common people. At first, she had set up a sales area beside her café, but it soon became popular, so she rented a new store. According to the employees, novelty products that were popular among nobles and the quality of the cosmetics, although they were cheaper versions, seemed to have fuelled the rumours.

"Welco.... Oh, Ojou-sama?"

Ronnie, who was carrying luggage, noticed her, but she put her index finger to her mouth. She had a lot of baggage today, so she came here to ask Ronnie to help her carry them.

Cordelia walked to the office with Ronnie, who was trying to carry all the bags to the back of the store.

"What's wrong? The servants have been excited with preparations for the tea party since His Highness is coming tomorrow... Is it alright for you to be here, Ojou-sama?"

"That's exactly why I'm here."

"Ah, you couldn't stay calm? Well, how about some tea since you're here? I was thinking about taking a break now too."

Ronnie looked the same as always as he said that.

Then, Cordelia suddenly remembered what Ronnie had said in the past.

"Ojou-sama? What're you thinking about?"

"Hey, I know it's a bit late to ask this, but you said that you weren't surprised when the servants were gossiping about His Highness and I at the mansion, right? Why was that?"

"Did I say that?"

"You did."

"I don't remember that, but you went to Oulu Village with His Highness, didn't you? Do you remember? The Flantheim House's young master was with you two."

Cordelia froze when she heard that.

"... Ronnie, you knew?"

"Huh? You didn't, Ojou-sama? No, I did think that it was possible you didn't."

“Then, you should have confirmed that with me...!”

“Don’t be absurd. His Highness might have been trying to hide his identity from me as well, and if he noticed, then I might have to take responsibility for any problems that may arise.”

She could understand Ronnie’s point. However, Ronnie told her how he realised that Gille was Sylvester before she could ask him.

“It was only a little bit, but I could see His Highness’s magic mix with the Flantheim House’s young master’s. I remember it since I saw him at a parade once. That’s why I noticed it when we went to Oulu.”

“I can’t see it.”

Ronnie’s abilities could only be described as extraordinary since he could recognise who Gille was just by looking at him.

(Honestly, why is he working for us when he’s this amazing...?)

I’m beyond grateful that he is working for us, and he says he doesn’t want to be in the military so it’s fine as long as he’s happy with it. But if he was willing to, then he could become someone who would go down in history.

Cordelia felt complicated when she thought this.

◆◆◆◆◆

After Cordelia finished her conversation with Ronnie, she returned to the sales floor again to see the displays.

Then, the door opened, and a new customer came in.

“Tsk.”

An unwilling voice entered Cordelia’s ears. The one who had uttered that familiar voice was a familiar pink haired woman.

“... Welcome?”

Shelley, who she hadn’t seen since that day, was standing there.

“Why are you here?”

That was Cordelia’s line.

“Even if you ask me why... because this is my store?”

While answering, Cordelia tilted her head at Shelley’s outfit.

Cordelia could understand if she dressed like that to go incognito, but the clothes also looked well-worn.

Shelley let out a big sigh when she heard Cordelia's reply.

"... This sucks."

Cordelia didn't often experience this being said to her, and by a woman at that.

However, Shelley glared at Cordelia and grabbed her arm. Cordelia didn't shake her off because she couldn't feel any magic from Shelley or anything like she had before at the evening party.

"What's wrong?"

"I want to talk to you. We'll stand out here, right? We can talk just over there."

Shelley's tone was still arrogant, but Cordelia couldn't sense any hostility from here even if Shelley viewed her as an enemy. She told Shelley to wait, then told Ronnie she was going out for a while before leaving the shop.

Shelley, who was waiting in front of the store, started walking when she saw Cordelia come out and stopped a block away from the store.

They stood against the building so they could watch people walk by, and then Shelley spoke after a while.

"I don't regret what I did to you at all."

In contrast to her words, Shelley's expression didn't look good. She still had an irritated expression on her face, so her true intentions must lie elsewhere.

"I see."

"... That's all?"

"Yes."

"I don't like you after all."

Shelley looked disappointed. She was probably prepared to be insulted. Still, Cordelia felt that Shelley was different from before.

Cordelia hadn't forgotten that Shelley had caused her a lot of trouble and nearly killed her. However, the verdict had already been passed for that incident, and Ghost had something to do with her actions, so Cordelia felt like it was too late to question Shelley.

In the first place, Cordelia couldn't dismiss the possibility that she could have become 『Cordelia』 if she didn't have her previous life memories.

"... Then let me ask you something. What kind of dreams did you have? Did you dream about me acting violently?"

"That's right. In my dreams, you were domineering, and you were merciless in your attempts to win His Highness over. You were an arrogant woman who placed blame on other ladies and were quick to

bring up your House name. And you were quick to cause trouble. That's why in my dreams, His Highness was troubled because your House tried to make him marry you."

Shelley didn't look at Cordelia at all and continued to speak plainly.

"So, I wanted to get rid of all the things that would make His Highness unhappy. Because in my dreams, we were in love with each other and I was able to dispel his sadness. That's why —— I made a mistake, but I don't regret it. I just did what I wanted to do."

Then, Shelley glared at Cordelia after having said that much.

"In any case, you want to say that the you in my dreams is exactly like me, right?"

"I didn't say anything."

If she asks me if I think that, then I can only say yes. However, if she understands this herself, then I don't dare point it out.

"More importantly, I heard that you were resting in your fief."

"Yes, publicly that is. But I don't want to be imprisoned in the mansion either. No one wants to marry a lady who has caused a ruckus, even if it was because of a curse, that person was furious. He always told me I could act according to my dreams. How selfish of him."

She must be referring to Earl Clydereine.

Cordelia stared at Shelley quietly without replying and Shelley turned away awkwardly.

"Don't look at me with pity. I can't go to that house anymore, but I was able to buy a house with a storefront near here with the consolation money that I'd never make if I had worked normally, and I was able to start working."

"Oh my, what kind of place is it?"

"It's a massage parlour. I used some cosmetics when I was an 『Ojou-sama』 and they felt good. I thought it was perfect since there was a shop selling good essential oils, but it sucks that it's your store."

Then, Shelley glared at Cordelia.

"... It was you, wasn't it? You're the person who made my punishment lighter."

"..."

"I even accepted a curse because I really thought that it would be good if you were gone. And yet, I can't believe the only thing that happened to me was that my magic was sealed... If you hadn't pleaded for me, then I'm sure I would have received a harsher punishment."

Shelley seemed to be able to assess the situation better than she had back then. She looked like she wanted to swear at Cordelia, but she didn't seem possessed.

"I only told them 『Shelley-san is delusional, so she might not realise the truth』."

"You really are the worst...! I didn't like you from the moment I met you!"

Is she talking about when we met in front of the church for the first time? Cordelia recalled what had happened back then, and suddenly remembered something that bothered her.

“Come to think of it, you once said His Highness saved you, but when was that?”

“... When I was little. I sold flowers in the city when my mother was still alive. At that time, His Highness saved me when he went out incognito.”

“Huh?”

“I didn’t know who it was at first. But His Highness appeared in my dreams when I wondered if there was anything I could do for him. I thought it was a joke at first too, but when I saw His Highness at the parade, I was shocked beyond words.”

“...”

“I knew it was him... You don’t believe me, do you?”

“I don’t, but I can’t refute either. I don’t have the power to do so.”

“Yeah right. My dreams aren’t even correct.”

Cordelia smiled wryly at the way Shelley had said that.

Her dreams were certainly wrong when they were about herself but 『Gille』 is 『Sylvester』.

“Shelley-san, I was probably there too.”

“What?”

“It was in front of a magic tool shop on artisan street, right? His Highness was the person who had leaped out, but Vernoux-sama was the person who had knocked the man out and I was the person who constricted his feet.”

All emotions drained from Shelley’s face.

Although Cordelia was smiling, she never imagined that she had already encountered Shelley from back then.

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier?!”

“Because I didn’t know either.”

“You should have!”

“That’s impossible!”

“Oh my god, this sucks.”

Shelley looked more embarrassed than ever before, and Cordelia had no words to say to her. She would be adding fuel to the fire no matter what she said.

“... But, it’s strange. I feel calm ever since I stopped dreaming.”

“So, you’re glad that your magic was sealed?”

“That’s right. I had magic, but I never used it consciously before I was taken in and the dreams just came by themselves. So, I don’t feel any inconvenience without it.”

Shelley straightened her back and took a step.

“Are you leaving already?”

“Yes, I’ll go home after I buy what I need. I’ll use my own products and when I become a millionaire who can hire a lot of employees, and so you should be sure to regret this.”

“That means you’ll help us promote our products. I’m looking forward to it.”

“... Horrible!”

Shelley glared at Cordelia and stomped her feet, then she turned around. But she didn’t leave, and her shoulders were shaking. *What’s wrong?* Cordelia thought, then Shelley said clearly, “Say...”

“Yes?”

“... Thanks.”



Her voice was quiet compared to before.

Cordelia couldn't help but blink since those words weren't like Shelley.

“What?”

“Don't 『What?』 me. Did you miss what I said? Argh, honestly this sucks! I shouldn't have said it!”

Shelley said before walking off without turning back to look at Cordelia.

Perhaps Shelley will continue to come to my store to shop, but still, our lives won't interfere with each other's anymore.

“——— Though, I'm not kind enough to wish you well either.”

Nevertheless, Cordelia secretly wished that Shelley's life would progress from now on since she was able to escape from her 『Heroine』 power, —— or from Cordelia's perspective, her curse.

Act 68: To Pile Up Happiness

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

On that day when the cloudless, piercing blue sky spread over the royal capital, Cordelia was dressed in a pure white dress.

She recalled the twists and turns that led to the selection of this dress.

At first, she had thought that it wouldn't take much time to choose a dress. She knew what she had wanted to wear, but Nirupama and Malvina intervened a lot since it was a once a lifetime opportunity. They had heated discussions with the designer, dressed her in gowns with similar designs, and she felt like a dress-up doll day after day for nearly a month.

It was Sylvester who stopped the deadlock.

『I'm sure Cordelia would look good in this design.』

The design was close to what Cordelia had wanted. The dress that Cordelia had chosen first had been rejected by Nirupama and Malvina: 『It's a once in a lifetime opportunity, so why don't you try to wear something new?』, and she agreed with them after thinking a little. Both of them respected each other's wishes and ignored the wishes of the person who was going to wear the dress.

While Cordelia understood that her sister and aunt were spending hours on this because of her, she wanted to get on with other preparations as well, so she thanked Sylvester deeply.

However, Sylvester smiled a little.

『I said it more for me than you, Dilly. It's not fair that Countess Weltoria and my sister-in-law are taking up all your time, right?』

The finished princess-line wedding dress had a long lace veil, which she hadn't heard about when she took the measurements, and she was surprised that it was more gorgeous than she had expected it to be.

“Ojou-sama, are you alright?”

“Yes. I would love to have some tea, but as you can imagine, it's not a good time to drink tea.”

Her makeup had been put on beautifully, and she didn't want to get lipstick on her cup. She also didn't want to fill her stomach with water while she was wearing this dress. She liked the design of the dress, but it was suffocating since it was pretty tight.

Emina laughed at Cordelia.

“I think this is the last time I'll be calling you 『Ojou-sama』. It feels a bit lonely.”

“I'm going to sneak over the greenhouse to visit, so I'll be happy if you call me that during those times.”

“Okay.”

A clear knock sounded at the door while they were talking and the servant who was standing near the door opened it.

Sylvester appeared.

“I see you’re finished.”

“I heard the groom is supposed to wait at the temple.”

“Sorry. But I have something to tell you.”

Hearing those words, Emina exchanged looks with the servants in the room, then bowed.

“Your Highness, we would like to excuse ourselves for a while.”

“Sorry about this.”

“But, it’s nearly time for the ceremony. We won’t have time to fix Cordelia-sama’s makeup, so please understand.”

“Alright.”

Cordelia didn’t know what Sylvester had agreed with for a moment but speaking of reasons why her makeup would get messed up ———.

“You got it. I was going to rehearse a little, but I guess I’ll have to wait until the ceremony to kiss you.”

“Your Highness! You have something to tell me, don’t you? Besides, aren’t you the one with the graze on your cheek? We need to get it treated...”

“Ah, it’s a medal.”

“Medal?”

“I finally got a hit on Elvis earlier.”

Cordelia blinked at his words.

“You seemed surprised. It’s true that I don’t know if I’ll win next time, but Elvis said, 『What’s the point of being happy about winning against an old man』 ?”

“You had a match with him even though it’s almost time for the ceremony... I’m sorry my father has caused you so much trouble.”

Elvis didn’t ask Cordelia about the progress between Sylvester and her, probably because Sylvester had said 『If I can persuade Cordelia』 . In the first place, their relationship developed naturally, and she wasn’t seduced. Cordelia only worried about various things, but Elvis would always seem worried about everything. He made Sylvester go home early whenever he came to the mansion and also made Cordelia come home early whenever she went to the castle. Nevertheless, she thought that Elvis had given his approval to Sylvester’s proposal six months ago, and although he had been less responsive a few days after, he had regained his usual composure when they went on inspections together, but ———.

“No, I’m the one who asked him to have a match with me. I thought Elvis would be worried if I didn’t beat 『Otou-san』 once, and it also didn’t sit with me.”

The scar on Sylvester’s face wasn’t noticeable, and he seemed satisfied. Cordelia looked at him and shrugged her shoulders without saying anything more.

“Even though Elvis had certainly said 『I don’t plan on marrying her off to anyone for at least three years』, I felt cheated. I can’t believe he didn’t let me marry you for four years.”

“He hadn’t said that he would marry me off in three years, so I feel bad somehow... Anyway, it’s almost time.”

However, Sylvester groaned and showed no signs of leaving.

“I don’t want to leave.”

“What are you saying?”

The other day he had said, 『I can’t wait for our ceremony』, but it was hard for her to react when he said the previous statement with a serious expression on his face.

“Once the ceremony starts, I’ll be busy, so I won’t be able to talk to you until night-time.”

“... We’ll always be together from now on, so please bear with it.”

She wondered what he was saying and put her hand on her forehead, but Sylvester wouldn’t obey her.

“Then, I’ll put up with it if you call my name.”

“That’s a very cheap request.”

“You say that but you usually call me 『Your Highness』 at the castle and in the Pameradia mansion. You call me 『Gille-sama』 when we go out, maybe because we were in public... I wish you would call me by my name once in a while.”

Cordelia coughed once at his childish tone, and then slowly opened her mouth.

“Then please show me that you are a dependable Prince, Sylvester-sama.”

“...”

“What’s wrong?”

Cordelia thought he was dissatisfied with something else, but he laughed gently.

“No. I just thought that I forgot to mention at the beginning that the dress looks great on you. It’s a waste for you to become my wife.”

“Oh my. Then, what kind of man would be a good match for me?”

“That’s... I hope that I’m the only man who is a good match for you.”

Cordelia replied with a smile at those words.

“Well then, I will do my best every day so that I won’t be embarrassed to be by your side, Sylvester-sama.”

He replied by holding out his hand to her instead of speaking.

Cordelia put her hand on top of his.

When she had recovered her memories, she thought that this was a horrible reincarnation.

But she had been blessed and had met many wonderful people in this world. She was allowed to do what she wanted to do and achieve her wishes with a lot of help.

Of course, she had bitter experiences as well, but she was able to make a lot of people smile, and she herself smiled a lot.

“I’m really glad that I was born.”

Cordelia vowed that she would pile up happiness and share it with those around her just like she had in the past.

Final Act: And, the Tale that Continues in the Future

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Cordelia's Perspective

A month after the wedding.

It was late at night when Gille-sama returned from his inspection of the northern part of Crista Kingdom.

I heard he had already had dinner, but he said he was going to have a light drink, so I had simple snacks like cheese and ham prepared for him.

Gille-sama doesn't drink much, but he might have wanted to drink a little since he had tomorrow off.

"What are you thinking about?"

"I was wondering if you have time tomorrow, Gille-sama."

I haven't decided what I want to invite him to do. Gille-sama blinked when I asked him if he was busy.

"Gille-sama?"

"Dilly, you ask strange things sometimes."

"Huh?"

"I came home early because I wanted to spend time with you. We've got all the time in the world."

I was confused when Gille-sama said that smoothly.

"Don't worry, I've properly finished all my work. But it's a little horrible that I suddenly had to leave the castle for ten days and stay away from my lovely wife when we'd just married."

I couldn't help but choke when Gille-sama said that without any hint of embarrassment.

"... Did something good happen?"

"Of course. I got to hear a welcome back from Dilly."

Gille-sama replied calmly to my question as I poured some wine, and I couldn't help but feel like he was teasing me.

"Can you refrain from drinking if you're drunk before you start?"

"Sorry, my bad. I didn't lie, but I was given an unexpected gift during the inspection."

Then he handed me a small box which looked quite expensive.

"Open it."

He prompted, so I did and inside, I found an amber pendant.

“This is...?”

“It’s a gift from Rufina-dono. She said it’s a late wedding gift.”

“From Rufina-sama?”

Of course, it wouldn’t be surprising if she found out that Gille-sama was in the north and paid him a casual visit, but she was currently preparing for her coronation.

Ghost had said that her conflict with her brother had been a sham, but according to Rufina-sama, 『It’s not like we’re not on bad terms, but I’m better than him』, and she didn’t seem to be willing to give up on the throne at all. However, she also admitted 『Well, he’ll probably take care of my funeral if I die』.

Ghost was handed over to Dulaus after he was interrogated in Crista.

Apparently, he had been surprisingly honest during the interrogation. However, this wasn’t because he had a change of heart, but because he wanted to enjoy imagining the demise of those who were involved with the evil deeds he had committed since he couldn’t get out of prison. So, he confessed everything.

The story after that was never officially announced in Crista, but Rufina-sama had written a letter, 『The ghost will disappear at dawn, and will never appear before anyone ever again』. In other words, it was like that.

“Rufina-dono is the same as always. She wanted to invite me to her coronation, so she asked me to ascend the throne as soon as possible. So absurd. She also said that it was my filial duty to get my father to retire early so that he can enjoy the rest of his life.”

“That’s...”

It was a rather rude comment to say to another kingdom’s royalty but jokes like that were typical of Rufina-sama, and she must be eager to see us.

“It’ll probably be difficult to see her right away, but I’m sure you’ll get the chance to meet her again.”

“You’re right. I’m really looking forward to it.”

Rufina-sama had mentioned that she would show me the royal capital of Dulaus in the past. That person wouldn’t forget that promise.

I looked at Gille-sama and his expression looked a little cloudy.

“Gille-sama? Is something wrong?”

“No... I feel like my gift seems shabby because you’ve received a very nice gift from Rufina-dono, so it’s a little hard to give it to you.”

He hadn’t changed from how he was a long time ago, but Gille-sama is a very honest person who doesn’t hide things. He doesn’t show this side of him when he is acting as 『the Prince』, so I can tell that he’s relaxed around me.

“I’ll be delighted with anything you give me Gille-sama.”

“Are you really alright with anything?”

“The things I have received from you have always been good.”

Gille-sama looked shocked for a moment at my words, but he immediately smiled and offered me a jar of candy.

“Here. They’re not expensive, but they’re very beautiful and come in a variety of flavours, so I thought you would be happy with them. You can eat them while you’re reading too.”

This jar of candy felt as brilliant as the amber pendant that Rufina-dono gave me. The candy came in a wide variety of colours and shapes and they all seemed to sparkle and shine.

“It’s very beautiful.”

“I’m glad you like it.”

I could hear that he was really relieved, but I was too preoccupied with moving the jar and looking at the various shapes and colours of the candy.

There wasn’t any candy of the same shape in the jar.

All of them were unique and it was like ——.

“Do you like it that much?”

“Huh? Oh, yes.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

I replied late since I was too focused on the jar, but half of Gille-sama’s wine was gone from his glass.

I was about to put the jar down on the table, but before I could, Gille-sama asked happily.

“Why do you like it?”

I answered his question with something that may have sounded a little strange.

“I thought that people were similar to these candies.”

“What do you mean?”

“All different colours and all different tastes. It feels the same as the diversity of people’s lives.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever thought about that kind of thing with candy, since candy can’t move on its own.”

He said and took the jar from my hand. It might be wrong to say he took it from me since he gave it to me, but it was unlike him to behave like this.

“Is something the matter?”

“It’s not fun for the candy to get all your attention, right? So, I’m taking it back for a bit.”

“What kind of jealousy is that? Candy isn’t a person, you know.”

Gille-sama laughed at my words and gave me back the jar.

“Why don’t you try one?”

Gille-sama did things at his own pace. He opened the lid of the jar in my hands and held one out to me. I took the candy and threw it into my mouth, then the sweet taste spread quickly in my mouth. The sweetness made me feel warm and fuzzy.

“You look happy.”

“Because I am.”

Not only because the candy made me feel this way.

I consider myself fortunate to have lived my life and continue to live my life surrounded by wonderful people as myself and not 『Cordelia』 .

I also felt loved every day, but I haven’t forgotten that I can express my feelings in the same way, and it’s a little embarrassing, but I’m fortunate that I can.

“Actually, those candies are also called 『Drop』 .”

“Hmm?”

“It’s a word that can mean 『separation』 and 『fall down』 .”

My days away from 『Cordelia』 will continue, surrounded by diverse people like this candy.

“Where does that word come from?”

Gille-sama tilted his head in curiosity., but I put an index finger to my mouth.

“That’s a secret.”

I snatched a drop from the jar and shoved it into Gille-sama’s mouth.

Gille-sama widened his eyes at my sudden action, but he immediately smiled gently.

I’m sure I have the same expression on my face as I look at him.

I’m very happy.

But this isn’t the end.

I hope that this is the prologue to my happiness, and I hope that I can continue to open my paths in the future without regret.



Extra 01: Blessing Song

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Elvis's Perspective

The sky was so clear as if it was suggesting that today was a blessing from the heavens, and His Highness was smiling at me carefreely. I wondered if I was being disrespectful for wanting to slander him by calling him a 'greenhorn'.

"I've finally reached you after eight years."

I didn't get sloppy just because I received a single hit from him. In fact, I had also grazed his cheek because I hadn't gone easy on him.

Even so, he was able to get a hit on me.

Although I've felt myself decline from my golden days, I still understand how strong I am ——— to the extent that I didn't lose that much, not even against an active knight.

As a retainer, I'm happy that His Highness has gotten stronger.

But, I'm not in the mood to congratulate him.

"What's the point of being happy about winning against an old man?"

I'm not going to say that it was a coincident, and I'm not going to make excuses about him accurately exploiting the opportunity that had been presented to him. However, this might be immature of me, but I'm not wasted away enough for him to use the same method twice.

"Of course, I'm not quite there yet. But I think it means a lot for me to be able to get a hit on you today. Elvis, you must be worried about giving your daughter to a very weak man."

Today, does he mean the ceremony?

If so, then I would like to keep my win as it has been instead of worshipping His Highness's growth.

I'm not opposed to this marriage. However, I don't want it either.

The only reason I accepted was because Cordelia wanted it. I would have wished for this if it was 20 years ago, but ——— I don't wish for it anymore and didn't think about it either, so it was hard to express my feelings when the conversation took a turn in that direction.

"Father-in-law, please continue to guide me."

"... Don't call me that in public."

"Unfortunately, I understand that well. Please forgive me for calling you that."

I couldn't say anything further because His Highness looked apologetic. I wasn't sure what to say about this because I had already agreed to it.

Even though I thought that, I still couldn't believe that His Highness had asked Cordelia to marry him. When I first heard His Highness's proposal, I thought it was nothing more than a joke.

It's not surprising for Cordelia to have met His Highness at the castle, but I've never heard her mention him before. However, even if his proposal to persuade her was surprising, Cordelia's reaction to him was as if they were old friends.

If I think about it that way, I felt like I had suffered more damage, but ———.

"Please listen to my declaration. I think I will put Cordelia through many hardships because of my position. But I will do my best to make her feel glad that she's with me no matter what happens."

It doesn't feel bad that my daughter is important enough to him that he had to go out of his way to tell me this. As His Highness said, it could be more troublesome for her to marry him rather than have her marry into another family or have her take over the Weltoria House. His words told of his inexperience, but I noticed from how he handled his sword today that he didn't plan on leaving that as a pipedream.

Although, I had already thought that marrying her to the royal family wasn't an option anymore, if he feels that strongly about this, then it's unlikely that it would end badly for Cordelia even if I don't feel like it would benefit the Pameradia House much.

However, I don't have any undue concerns either.

Because it's Cordelia who is getting married.

Even if the outcome is different from what I had imagined, I don't think that girl will just grieve and not do something about it.

"Your Highness, please don't get too worked up about it."

"Are you cheering for me as my father-in-law?"

"No, there is something called divorce in this world."

So, when I told him that Cordelia shouldn't be overwhelmed, His Highness widened his eyes for a moment, but quickly shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"That's the biggest advice the father of the bride can give me on the day. I'll try my best not to let Cordelia say that you are better, Father-in-law."

Then, His Highness left.

I supposed he had called me out because his preparations were done for the most part, but there's no spare time for the male lead today. However, if he had arranged this meeting even though he had no time, then it would be a good start for His Highness.

However, I was reminded of how quickly people grow up.

Before I knew it, the little boy had grown so much that I could picture him becoming the next king. I couldn't help but think that I was getting older and realised that Cordelia had reached the age where she was going to get married.

Honestly, I still don't understand why Cordelia suddenly grew emotionally attached to me.

Until that day, Cordelia had been a 'pawn' in my mind and not a 'person'. I decided on the day that I walked through the doors of the Pameradia House that I would spend my life trying to bring myself closer to the centre of the government by using my pawns and trying to make the world less unreasonable than I had felt it was when I was a child.

Therefore, Cordelia didn't have any special feelings towards me either. ——— I saw that she had many interests, so I did want to let her do what she wanted to do. However, I was truly surprised that she had even met my mother without me knowing about it.

But I found out once again that she was trying to please people even if it wouldn't benefit her.

My rational views were quite different from Cordelia's principle of conduct. However, I don't think that's a bad thing.

She can just do what she wants.

Even if there is something wrong with her actions, it's something based on her beliefs so if there's something that needs correcting it's the process and not the idea. She has always been a cautious and honest girl who sought the opinions of those around her, so she won't make any mistakes that cannot be correct.

Still, in the past, I hadn't abandoned the possibility of making Cordelia the Prince's Queen even after 'that day'. However, I didn't feel the need to rush it either. In terms of power, I was able to get what I needed through my own actions. We're stable enough now that I've regained what was lost in the previous generations, and on the contrary, if we were to gain more power, then we will need to be more vigilant and it would be a bad move. Therefore, I was thinking of getting Countess Weltoria to adopt her or find a House where she could have more freedom to marry her into ——— but as it turns out, she's going to marry into the royal family.

I feared that His Highness's remark may have caused his family to make plans for his marriage, or cause them to hasten the marriage, so I did say a few words to him. I didn't educate my daughter to marry into the royal family in the first place either, and a troublesome situation may occur.

However, His Highness refuted by saying that I was worrying too much. Leonard even said something that wasn't even funny, 『I understand it's disappointing to marry her off. If you're that worried, then how about marrying her to Vernoux?』

Needless to say, I ignored what Leonard had said, but I won't say that I don't want to marry her off. However, His Highness left Cordelia with a choice. I decided to let Cordelia decide since he had shown that attitude even though I was in a position to say no. But we needed to discuss the circumstances concerning the Pameradia House in a timely manner.



I decided to leave this place as well when His Highness's back was out of sight.

I also have the role of 『Father of the Bride』 today. Someone might search for me if I stay in a place like this.

On my way back, I saw a familiar face from in front of me. It was Flantheim's son, and he seemed to be looking for someone. I'm sure he's looking for His Highness, but I didn't dare call out to him.

However, he couldn't ignore me as soon as he saw me.

“Earl. Congratulations.”

“Yeah.”

“I'm sorry for troubling you at such a short notice, but have you seen His Highness?”

So, I was right, I thought as I told him, “He already went back,” and Leonard's son sighed in relief. If he was able to outsmart even his close aids in the midst of a packed schedule, then His Highness might become big in the future.

However, Leonard's son seemed to have helped His Highness sneak out for the forest incident as well, so perhaps it wasn't hard at all.

Needless to say, the Flanheim House is a prominent House. But other than their outward achievements, they have been known to use their abilities to substitute for the royal family in the past.

And there is something I want to confirm with this man.

“Were you the one who arranged for Cordelia and His Highness to meet?”

“It's hard to confirm that when you're glaring at me like that... but I can't deny it.”

I wasn't surprised since I was almost certain of this, but I felt like I had been outsmarted, just like what had happened with His Highness.

I knew that this man had been visiting my house since he was a child, and Leonard, who can't keep quiet about his love life, hadn't said anything about his son's visits either, so I thought it was something that I didn't have to care much about. I thought that Leonard would tease me if there was something going on between his son and my daughter, and if nothing happened, then it would be convenient back then since Cordelia had few chances to talk to children in the same age group as her. I never even imagined that would cause Cordelia to be involved with His Highness.

I don't know how long they've been getting along. They had clearly interacted with each other after the competition but considering that the roses that grew in our greenhouse was the same as the ones that grew in the royal palace greenhouse, they might have interacted much earlier.

I could question this man more, but I can't do anything about it even if I find these things out, so I didn't dare ask. In this first place, I wasn't good at this kind of talk.

"I have also seen how serious His Highness is about her. You can be rest assured."

"I don't need you to tell me that."

I answered straight away, and he had the same expression on his face as Leonard. I thought that his son was calmer but seeing this expression on his face made me consider that they were father and son after all, and both had decent personalities.

"What? Are you going to recognise this?"

"Recognise what?"

"No, I won't say any more than this."

"... I'm sure I wouldn't have been surprised if a marriage proposal had come from the Flantheim House."

"Oh, you were going to make me your son?"

"Don't joke."

I won't deny that the chances weren't zero, but it was just that it was infinitely impossible.

"Then I'd like to joke about one thing. Please don't say this is a good opportunity for you to retire."

"What are you talking about?"

Considering my age, I should retire soon, but I've never thought about it.

"Also, if you hide in your fief, then you would have less opportunities to see your grandchildren."

"..."

"... I'm sorry, I didn't expect you to look so conflicted."

Leonard's son wasn't joking when he had apologised, but it was hard to react. I already have grandchildren from Cyrus and Malvina, and nothing is resolved from him stating that. But even if he hadn't mentioned grandchildren, I don't intend on leaving the royal capital for a while.

"His Highness has asked me to continue guiding him. I can't retire that easily."

"I see. His Highness must have been relieved when you agreed. Of course, Princess Cordelia will be relieved to have her father nearby."

What does he mean?

However, I don't plan on talking to him for a long time. I broke off the conversation and turned my heel, and then Leonard's son also headed back where he came from. Our footsteps grew more distant to each other.

The ceremony will begin soon.

It would be nice if I gave a toast to them at a time like this, but unfortunately, nothing comes to mind. I've never been troubled by the fact that I wasn't talkative, but I can't help but wonder if I had made a mistake for not putting more effort into it.

In retrospect, I've lived my life to my satisfaction. Some of the things I couldn't accomplish on my own, and some of them were because of Cordelia.

That's why I hope that my daughter can continue to follow the path that will satisfy her.

That's all.

Extra 02: 『Teachings of a Feudal Lord』

Translator: Blushy

Editor: delishnoodles

Wow! I've finally finished translating all of drop. Thank you for sticking with me through this project. I hope you enjoyed it and look out for my next project~!

<3

Cordelia knew long ago that her aunt, Countess Nirupama Weltoria, had a strong and straightforward personality, but the personality that she had seen at the fief was a lot stronger than she ever thought.

First, she was aggressive while negotiating. However, she didn't just insist on her own ideas, and did compromise to a certain extent, but she searched for the person's upper most limit of compromise. In addition, she makes her business partners laugh and say, 『I'm no match for the Countess』, so she was very good at strategizing.

When Cordelia shared her impressions with Nirupama at dinner, Nirupama smiled happily.

“What do you think is the big difference between a normal conversation and a business negotiation, and what do you think is important when talking to someone?”

“I think it's preparing enough to talk to your partner calmly and how nervous you are. And if you know about the person beforehand, then it's possible to steer the conversation from a normal chat to new negotiations.”

“I'm impressed by your immediate answer. I'm sure you will have big negotiations to deal with in the future. I'm sure you'll be alright seeing how you act now, but don't underestimate the other person too much. This is very important, not only for negotiations, but also as a feudal lord.”

“As a feudal lord, you say?”

She knew it was important having it said, but Cordelia was interested in what Nirupama had brought up as a reminder.

Nirupama chuckled at Cordelia's reaction.

“If all the information available totalled ten, and they knew seven of those and I only knew three, I could mislead them into thinking that I have all the information that they don't depending on how I speak. But that would give me a leg up if I'm not on good terms with them, or if they were my subordinate, then I would look incompetent to them. In addition, I'll miss out on the chance of gaining new information.”

“I'll keep that in mind.”

“On the other hand, it's fortunate if they look down on me.”

Cordelia smiled back at Nirupama who had added, playfully.

“But, what's really important is... to sell all the fights that you've accepted.”

“Huh?”

“But that’s just a part of my personality. Fufufu, I think it’s best not to let stress build. Of course, if you get too caught up in that, then you might neglect important things, so you have to give up if that happens. But you just have to work hard so you don’t have to give up, you know...?”

Cordelia forced a smile on her face when she felt a black air slowly begin to drift from behind her aunt. *What kind of tough person would pick a fight with Obaa-sama? But if that motivates her, then it might contribute to the development of Weltoria fief in a way. That should be a good thing... right?*

However, Cordelia quietly decided that she would do her best to keep things as peaceful as possible when it came to negotiations.

After all, Cordelia preferred peace above all.